

The *Chatelaine* Legacy

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Cet article évalue le travail de Doris Anderson, rédactrice en chef du magazine "Chatelaine" et plus particulièrement ses messages éditoriaux des années soixante-dix. Ces textes ont formé le pivot de ce magazine "crypto-féministe." Du haut de sa tribune, elle a fait la promotion de toute une cohorte de femmes au Canada, elle les a éduquées et éventuellement elle les a politisées.

With the exception of a few memoirs, and anthologies, the history of the second-wave feminist movement in Canada still awaits her historian (see Adamson and Briskin; Anderson 1996; Backhouse and Flaherty; Lévesque; Macpherson; Rebick). When that history is written, significant attention needs to be paid to the ways in which one unlikely source—*Chatelaine* magazine, Maclean Hunter's mass-market women's periodical—played a formative role in disseminating a consistently liberal-feminist message to its readers from the late 1950s through to the late '70s. The primary reason for that editorial policy decision was editor Doris Anderson's determination to differentiate *Chatelaine* from its American competitors. Most consistently, the feminist message was to be found in Anderson's editorial essays at the front of each issue of the magazine. Her editorials gave voice to feminist demands for policy and social changes, in addition to offering an analysis of women's roles and status in modern Canadian society. The need to recognize, and indeed celebrate, Anderson's historic achievements is even more significant now that her unique voice has fallen silent. Those people fortunate enough to have known Doris in person, will smile knowingly at that double entendre, for her twangy drawl was as distinctive as was her ready laughter. Those who only knew her in print, likewise, would recognize her distinctiveness as an essayist and writer who managed to combine passionate, political advocacy for the discriminated and disadvantaged (most often women, children or the poor) leavened with healthy doses of wry wit, self-deprecation and refreshing candour. Thus, it was an honour to be

invited to participate in this special edition of *Canadian Women's Studies* because it gave me the opportunity to once again immerse myself in Anderson's editorials and to offer some reflections upon her legacy.

Doris Anderson's involvement with *Chatelaine* magazine began in 1951 when she was hired as a promotional assistant. Very quickly, her talent became evident and she was promoted to a position as a staff writer and then managing editor before finally landing the spot as editor in 1959. She would hold that position for eighteen years, which is proof of both her editorial and commercial success. As I have addressed, at length, in my book *Roughing it in the Suburbs*, Anderson's tenure at *Chatelaine* was one of editorial innovation.¹ Under her leadership, she transformed a traditionally popular national women's general interest periodical—which offered readers fiction, articles, housekeeping features, editorials, and a hefty dose of advertisements—into a commercially successful, "closet" feminist magazine. In an era when most American women's magazines (*Chatelaine's* competitors) were conservatively edited by their male editors to focus primarily on women's unpaid work in the home as wives, mothers, and consumers, Anderson adhered to her own perceptions of what the "typical" Canadian woman wanted. Most refreshingly, she thought that her own interests were the interests of her readers and thus, she did not patronize them. Women like Jean MacGregor, of St. Catharines, Ontario, responded to this noticeably different editorial voice, when she observed "your objective and informative editorials, particularly on the subject of 'us' and you never talk down to us—are most useful and encouraging" (116).

In addition to valuing her readers' intelligence and abilities, Anderson took her responsibilities as editor very seriously, viewing her position as one that afforded her the opportunity to highlight political and social issues. Her editorship was not merely a platform from which to reinforce the consumerist ethos beloved by advertis-



Doris Anderson, 1970. Photo: Normunds Berzins.

ers and publishers. In 1970, she appeared at the Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media and offered this illuminating comment about why she wrote a monthly editorial essay, and how she expected readers to respond to those editorials.

I find the editorial, the personalized editorial form, a very useful device for covering sharp, controversial issues very quickly, and I would hate to give it up. I cannot see that I'm going to give it up. I can't see that I'm going to run out of topics, or that the country is going to have all its problems so beautifully solved that I am going to have nothing to say. (Anderson qtd. in *Senate of Canada* 61)

Famously noted for having been one of the few feminist, mass media voices to call for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women, and then later to continually critique the government for not implementing the recommended policy changes that would have helped women to achieve more equitable status within Canadian society, she was not merely a one-note symphony. Consider the range of topics, and issues that she addressed in 1970 alone: the impact of sixties activism; women and the environment; working mothers; married women's financial situation and legal invisibility; scare mongering about the pill; pollution; the lack of female political representation; sexist pop cultural depictions of women and men; abortion; and multiple editorials extolling second wave feminism.

From this wonderfully rich vein of material, it is difficult to select representative samples of Anderson's stirring words. Depressingly one could reprint her editorials about the fate of the environment, or the plea for universal daycare, now, in 2007, and have them seem as timely as ever. Listen to her chastise the government about the "new" abortion law that was supposed to decriminalize abortion and provide Canadian women with equal access to safe, hospital abortions.

What they [the government] didn't expect was an immediate clamorous campaign to have the law made more liberal. *Chatelaine* published an article, last November, pointing out that nothing had changed. In fact the new law probably made it harder to get an abortion than before.... In our Canadian "double-think" we make safe abortions available to the wealthy and influential (as they always have been) and force the poor to take their chances with ugly, dangerous, back street butcher shops. It also seems illogical in a country with thousands of neglected and unadopted children that we worry so much about the welfare of unborn babies. (1970: 1).

One cannot underscore how atypical Anderson's plain spoken, often sardonically blunt, comments were for a woman's magazine. Anderson's indictment of government law and complacency was read by a combined circulation of 1,225,000 English and French readers ("Circulation

Figures” 1). As one might suspect, these jolts registered differently on readers, depending on their age, religious affiliation, educational attainment and class background. Editorials and articles on abortion always received a huge volume of mail—most of it very negative. Indeed, in her farewell editorial, Anderson specifically singled-out the persistence of the anti-abortion protestors and their letter writing campaigns, revealing that, when the magazine first published an article calling for abortion reform in 1963, *Chatelaine* received “threats that the magazine would be closed down and that I personally would be fired. (And

women’s issues (starting in 1972 you could subscribe to *Ms. Magazine*). However, if you lived in a Canadian small-town or rural setting, mass media was your best bet—and the most persistent, positive portrait of feminism in Canada came via the pages of *Chatelaine*.

Not surprisingly, mail about the feminist material was mixed but what is striking is that favourable letters regarding feminist editorials and articles arrived from all regions, and from both urban and rural readers. People like Mrs. O. G. Gursky from Ogema, Saskatchewan, wrote Anderson “to tell you how much I enjoy your editorials. So very often

Editorials on feminism covered the gamut from basic educational attempts to highlight feminist issues, to acerbic rebuttals of male perceptions of “women’s libbers.” Anderson was also not afraid to speak to the anxieties of her comfortably married readers who might have thought feminist ideas were not their concern.

we still get the same virulent letters every time we return to that controversial topic.” (1977a: 2).

Editorials on feminism covered the gamut from basic educational attempts to highlight feminist issues, to acerbic rebuttals of male perceptions of “women’s libbers.” More notably, Anderson was also not afraid to speak to the general anxieties of some of her comfortably married, middle-class readers who might have thought feminist ideas were not their concern. In November 1977 she pointedly asked readers

to cast your minds back one hundred years. You would not be able to vote and you would also have no say about your own money—whether you earned it or inherited it. If your husband squandered it, beat you up, snatched away the children and refused to let you see them, you would have no way of making him behave better, legally. You would have as much chance of getting to university as a giraffe. The gains that were made for women were made by a small band of militant women—and the males who agreed with them. They picketed parliament, chained themselves to fences and went to jail. But they made great gains for women while the vast majority of women were actively against them or neutral. (1977b: 1)

Editorials such as these were incredibly important because in the early ’70s, even though more young women were heading to university campuses, classes that we now take for granted—in women’s studies, women’s history and social justice issues, were yet to be offered on most campuses. If you were fortunate to live in a large city, and had means, time and inclination, you could attend women’s group meetings, locate or establish a women’s centre, or subscribe to a few specialized newsletters about

you say simply and directly exactly what I feel. Especially encouraging is your championing of women, their right to ‘work’ or not to ‘work’ and their status” (100). American women rarely read *Chatelaine*, but when they did they often commented upon its distinctive format. New Yorker Joyce Gold had high praise for the magazine, writing: “I have just read *Chatelaine* for the first time. I find it marvelous. As you may know, virtually all U.S. magazines geared to women are edited and produced by men. Their aims seem chiefly to sell products and bring home to women that their place is primarily in the home, their duty in life is to cater to men’s needs. Your magazine is so much more realistic...” (116).

One can chart Anderson’s increasing editorial confidence from the late 1950s through the ’70s, as well as the evolution of the feminist messages. Initially, in the ’50s, she laid important groundwork by beginning to enumerate sexist and inequitable treatment. In the ’60s, Anderson played an important role in lobbying for what would become the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and tied to that project, she undertook a series of articles, questionnaires and editorials, that acted as a collective consciousness raising program as the magazine surveyed Canadian women’s status and aspirations. Publicity was also devoted to birth control and abortion issues and she consistently challenged marital and social norms about “appropriate” feminine behaviour. Part and parcel of her strong support of education and an engaged citizenry, she encouraged women to get more formal education and in particular, took pains to note that part-time courses would allow housewives and mothers to combine their unpaid work with schooling. The outcome of that education, she hoped, would lead to more economic self-sufficiency, and also that women would be represented in a broader spectrum of employment—not merely the traditional female sectors

of clerical, service, teaching, and nursing. Ultimately, she strongly believed that if Canadian women were aware of the systemic nature of discrimination, and they were vocal and confident, they could and should participate in the political process and work towards achieving improvements for women. In the '70s, she was clearly tired of the educational aspect of *Chatelaine's* feminist material and longed to see more concrete action and less talk. Editorials repeatedly tackled the government's failure to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and, not surprisingly, viewed the issue of women's under-representation in the House of Commons as one of the key impediments to achieving legislated gains for women. In a new development, she began to write passionately about the environment and pollution, and then in 1975 spent much time analyzing what, if any, tangible outcomes would result from the United Nations declared International Women's Year.

Changes in women's legal situation—divorce law in particular—became another pillar of the magazine's demand for action on women's behalf. In January, 1974, Anderson pointedly dissected "two court cases where women lost heavily" in an editorial which focused on the negative Supreme Court decisions regarding Jeanette Lavell, Yvone Bedard, and Irene Murdoch. Lavell and Bedard were Aboriginal women who had lost their



Doris Anderson with son, Peter, on his first Christmas, 1958.

YES, DEAR GOVERNMENTS, WE CAN AFFORD DAY CARE

Chatelaine, Editorial March 1971

One of our worst Canadian hang-ups is the idea that there is something sinful about providing day care for preschool children—or lunchtime supervision and after-school enrichment programs for elementary schoolchildren. Some lazy mother (logic seems to run) might be able to shirk her job....

We have half a million working mothers in Canada and they have over a million children under fourteen. There are also many more women on welfare who might be able to get off, if there were facilities for day care for children. We also know *all* children benefit from a mix of home and nursery school experience....

Almost forty years ago we found the money to set up a national broadcasting system. After the war we got around to subsidizing ballet, opera and the arts. We spent \$50 million on the Seaway and \$375 million on a pipeline. We've also managed to set aside \$10 million to help develop Canadian films. Isn't it about time we found money to spend on our children?

Doris Anderson, Editor

Indian status when they married non-Indian men, as per the regulations in the federal *Indian Act*. They sought to challenge this inequity in the courts and regretfully were unsuccessful when the Supreme Court ruled that the Bill of Rights did not apply in their situation. Irene Murdoch, an Alberta wife and rancher, sought to get an equitable share of the ranch lands and business that she had helped her husband of twenty-five years establish and run. In her divorce settlement, the Alberta court judge had deemed her contributions "only a normal contribution as a wife to the matrimonial regime" and thus she was not owed a share of the accrued wealth. Such blatantly discriminatory decisions were tailor-made for Anderson's editorial style and after highlighting some of the worst injustices in these cases she challenged all Canadian women to get vocal, stating "every woman in Canada should tell her MP how she stands on these matters" (1974c: 1).

In December of that year, Anderson rightly pointed with pride to the accomplishments at the magazine in publishing "issues of the day" and in seeking to educate, politicize and advocate on behalf of Canadian women.

We've written about housing, poverty, ecology, the plight of our Indians, lack of day care. We were the

TWO COURT CASES WHERE WOMEN LOST HEAVILY

Chatelaine, Editorial, January 1974

Two recent legal cases that came before the Supreme Court of Canada have set women back about twenty years.

One concerns two Indian women, Jeannette Lavell and Yvonne Bedard. Both of them had married non-Indians and they were contesting section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*, which states that women who marry non-Indians lose their Indian status. Indian men can marry non-Indian women and not only do they not lose their Indian status but they can bring their wives and any children the wives have from a former marriage to live as Indians on the reserve.

According to the Canadian Bill of Rights, all individuals have equality before the law without discrimination by reason of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex. But Mr. Justice Roland Ritchie, who handed down the decision, took the narrowest possible interpretation of the Bill of Rights—in effect, that the bill can't prevent a discriminatory law being passed in Canada, it can only make sure people are discriminated against equally.

Yet this same Mr. Justice Ritchie, only four years ago, said the Bill of Rights was powerful enough to prevent discrimination against an Indian man and declare a section of the *Indian Act*—that stated that it was an offense for an Indian to be drunk while off the reserve—invalid.

In other words, there is one law for Indian men and another for Indian women.

The case of Irene Murdoch is another glaring example of how much justice a woman can expect before the courts of this land. Irene Murdoch worked beside her husband for twenty-five years to build up the family ranch. She not only did the sewing, cooking, cleaning, but she had worked outside like a hired hand, mowing, driving trucks and tractors, quietening horses, dehorning cattle and branding. Yet, when she separated from her husband (and he broke her jaw in three places, costing her \$2,000 in medical bills and leaving her with a paralyzed lip and a speech impediment), the Alberta trial judge awarded her only \$200 a month. He callously stated that she had made “only a normal contribution as a wife to the matrimonial regime.” If you substituted “partner” for “wife,” a man who had worked like Irene Murdoch would not only get half the property but be recompensed for his injuries, and his assailant would go to jail.

Irene Murdoch in her own words didn't get “as much as a spoon” for her twenty-five years of toil. Her husband keeps the ranch, the buildings, the house, all the furniture, personal belongings, including her clothes, and the car. When she took her case to the Supreme Court, four out of five justices upheld the Alberta Court's decision. For all women in Canada who work beside their husbands in family stores, motels, small businesses of any kind, this should be a chilling warning. The Supreme Court protects males but not females.

Years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada made a decision that declared women, under Section 24 of the British North America Act, were not “qualified persons” and therefore couldn't sit in the Senate. But in those days the Privy Council in England was the last legal resort and it swiftly set the Supreme Court straight.

Today the Supreme Court is the last court of appeal. Parliament could still do something about the matter. Preferably with the three major parties agreeing, it could ask the British parliament to entrench the Canadian Bill of Rights in our constitution, which would protect women against discrimination.

If these cases are allowed to stand, they will not only affect the women concerned but they will—as legal decisions always do—affect women in all kinds of other ways. Every woman in Canada should tell her MP how she stands on these matters.

Doris Anderson, Editor

first magazine in North America to tackle the ugly subject of battered babies. We were espousing equal pay, women's rights and urging more women to run for Parliament long before Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique*. And we've never ducked the tough and controversial subjects of birth control, divorce, abortion, either.

Still, though, "one of the most irritating aspects of being the editor of a woman's magazine is that we are dismissed by people who don't read...." Those who did read it, she

the topics, and tone, and she was very adept at humour, particularly of the kind popularized by the best-selling American humourist Erma Bombeck. A few times per year, more personal essays about lazy summer days, the challenges and joys of motherhood, and critiques of popular culture (film, in particular, was a favourite) appeared. Beyond a change of pace, these essays offered readers some personal glimpses into the person in the editor's office. What people learned was that Anderson was a hapless homemaker and imperfect gardener, a dedicated wife and mother of three sons (later a divorced, single-parent), a

She wrote what were sometimes achingly personal essays about the exhaustion and depression caused by women's double day of labour, the systemic chauvinism and sexism in Canadian society, and of parenting gurus who laid the faults for all children's ills at the feet of working mothers.

noted, were delighted when the magazine "pleased" them but they also had to contend with "lots of thumps and angry cancellations" when the magazine displeased them (1974b: 1).

Pleased readers, like B. Isabelle George of Arcola, Saskatchewan, wrote: "It's editorials like International Women's Year ... that keep me buying *Chatelaine*. The source of change for any underprivileged group usually comes from education. There is still so much to be done in that area" (100). Nancy Ayearst, a member of Women's Place in Duncan, British Columbia, wrote to

express my admiration for your editorial comments on IWY [International Women's Year]. ... I am likewise impressed by the new format of *Chatelaine*. Some years ago I gave up on it as just another pots-and-pans magazine. In view of the acknowledgment of real-life women and down to earth articles dealing with specific problems and issues, I shall continue to purchase *Chatelaine* as a source for insight and enlightenment. (122)

Inferring impact in qualitative media studies is always rife with questions and qualifications. However, it is important to note that materials from *Chatelaine* got a wide secondary-dissemination—in reading groups, via clippings that were passed around at workplaces and between friends and family members, and less frequently in university classes—and thus their impact was much larger than the circulation figures suggested.²

Although Doris Anderson's editorials have been rightly praised for their feminist politics and for her forward-thinking, feminist perspective, it is important to note that had she just penned political columns, readers would have tired of them and tuned her out. She knew how to vary

product of a poor Calgary family and an aspiring fiction writer. Not one to forget her roots, nor to "put on airs," she offered up her own personal experiences and foibles to readers both as an effective literary device to build trust and commonality amongst them and to demonstrate that her life was not so far removed from that of the women who read *Chatelaine*. Certainly, she knew about struggle as much as she knew about success—and that is something she used constructively to motivate her readers. Using self-deprecation, she offered them gentle parables rather than lectures about improvement—to considerable effect. For instance in "how to live excitingly" she revealed her inner responses to people's observation about her so-called exciting life.

My triumphs in life are cavalier feats I manage to pull off that almost no one knows about. ... It's a Monday morning, when I've overeaten on the weekend. I make a bold (and flabby) front of things, leap lumpily on the scales, and I've won if I've gained three rather than five pounds.... It's making a broken field run to snatch up snowboots, mitts, rucksacks of school books, fling them into the cupboard, and arrive at the door before the guests have to ring twice.... It's writing an editorial and getting it in—puff, puff—dead on time. (1974a: 1)

This is material with which most women could identify.

Pointedly, her fame, did not inure her to the realities facing women who juggled paid and unpaid work while striving to achieve prominence in a male-defined world, Anderson knew the issues of daycare, office politics, women's legal and financial status and the corporate glass ceiling first-hand. So she wrote what were sometimes achingly personal essays about the exhaustion and

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why Bright Girls Quit

Regarding Catherine Sinclair's article, "The Waste of Canada's Bright Girls" [October], I am convinced that Canadian women will continue to be underachievers until management in the Canadian industry is educated to the fact that women can contribute professionally as much as, if not more than, their male counterparts.

An employer is invariably reluctant to hire a female scientist, engineer, or commerce graduate, since he reasons that she will probably marry soon and leave. Yet, he does not hesitate to employ a male graduate even though most young men spend short periods with several companies before making a career with one.

...A woman who does obtain a professional position is usually given minimum responsibility and required to report to a man who may or may not have qualifications and experience equivalent to hers. As a female chemist, I speak from experience.

—Mrs. F. C., Hamilton, Ont., *Chatelaine*, December 1964

Why Does Mother Work?

Concerning your article on "The Mother Who Works" [Jan.], I have one question: why? What does she believe she is accomplishing? Her salary, minus the extra expenses incurred, is the grand total of twenty-nine dollars a week. For this, she rearranges her life, her husband's, and her children's.

—Mrs. L. M., Scarborough, Ont., *Chatelaine*, April 1965

Women Workers

I have a few ideas that could perhaps help ["Women At Work," by Mollie Gillen, Feb.]:

1. Shorter work hours.
2. Tax exemptions for household help.
3. More time off. Perhaps a week every two months so she can catch up on neglected duties at home.
4. Consideration for the fact that she does have responsibilities at home. No responsible person could possibly leave her sick or young children if the domestic help doesn't show up at the last minute.

—Name withheld, *Chatelaine*, April 1969

depression caused by women's double day of labour, the systemic chauvinism and sexism in Canadian society, and of parenting gurus who laid the faults for all children's ills at the feet of working mothers. In "The Bad, The Good and the In-Between Days" she candidly wrote

then there are the smaller, personal versions of hell too ... it's the dull despair when a relationship that burnished every moment of your life slowly begins to erode.... It's mornings when you don't think its worthwhile to walk across the room to let the dog in, or rinse out the cups in the sink. That's all a bit of hell. But there's heaven too, and heaven is unpredictable—like sudden slash of sunlight through gunmetal-grey clouds. (1976: 4)

Readers used to Anderson's boundless energy and optimism were no doubt shocked by this short, bleak editorial. They wrote to thank her for her honesty, to share their own experiences, and to let her know that they had, in the words of Torontonian Marion Ford "a lump in my throat ... when you described quite perfectly those one-to-one hell and heaven times we don't often have time to evaluate" (80).

This, and other increasingly pointed editorials, were clues for perceptive readers that by the mid-seventies Anderson was beginning to chafe personally and professionally. Professionally, she really had accomplished everything she could with a woman's service magazine like *Chatelaine*. She let management know that she wanted to be promoted, either to a senior position at *Maclean's* (preferably editor) or into the publishing side of the business. Infuriatingly, she found herself bumping her head against the very glass ceiling that she had criticized. And so, in September 1977, she announced her departure. In "To My Readers: A Fond Farewell" she remarked upon the tremendous changes that had occurred for Canadian women since 1959, and how *Chatelaine* had been "a voice that spoke out" for changes for Canadian women. Uncertain what the future would hold, she indicated that she was going to try her hand at fiction. Appropriately, she ended by thanking her readers. "You obviously felt this magazine was your friend and advocate—and you have scolded us, praised us, and above all, let us know you cared. Thank you for your trust and intense concern" (1977a: 2).

Always modest about her accomplishments, and insights, in reality it had been Doris Anderson's 'voice' and vision that had launched and sustained *Chatelaine's* second-wave feminist journey from 1959 through 1977. She determined the editorial emphasis, wrote the foundational editorial essays and assembled a very capable team of editors and writers to produce the general feature articles that expanded upon those themes. The list of topics, interventions, and issues about which *Chatelaine* was engaged—the Royal Commission on the Status of Women; changes in women's legal status (particularly divorce); abortion reform; advocacy

for working women's rights; and publicity about abused children, is impressive. Equally, they worked towards increasing the representation of women in the Canadian political system, to highlighting the regional and economic inequities in the country (which, as we know, disproportionately affect women and children) and were not shy about writing about the terrible treatment of Aboriginal people. *Chatelaine* editorials and general features played a leadership role in publicizing feminist issues, urging policy changes, and highlighting areas where Canadian society needed revision. Anderson's distinctive voice may now be silent, but it should not be forgotten because she forged a path for Canadian women's activism in the 1950s, '60s and '70s that enabled a national audience of women, in cities, small towns, and farming communities to participate in the wave of feminism education, proposals for change and, ultimately, empowerment.

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¹Because my book concentrates on the magazine's achievements in the '50s and '60s, I have chosen to highlight Anderson's editorials from the 1970s.

²See my book *Roughing it in the Suburbs* for more detail about reader-response theory. Additionally, the book offers a variety of case studies, which examine the ways *Chatelaine* readers produced meaning from the text, critiqued offerings, and were influenced by the material in the periodical.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Scandinavia: Guide or Warning?

Your editorial on Scandinavia delighted me ["Scandinavia: Guidepost In Social Progress," February]. You've got a heart as well as a mind. Canada might well pattern herself after Sweden. It's inconceivable that capitalism has much longer to run. Women must take an ever-increasing role in shaping a new world. Their perception, depth and understanding are more formidable weapons than the arsenals of destruction.

—Mr. G. R. F., Toronto, Ont., *Chatelaine*, April 1964