

# An Osmotic Transfer

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MARJORIE HARRIS

*L'auteure se rappelle ses années à "Chatelaine" quand Doris était rédactrice en chef et son influence sur l'épanouissement de son féminisme durant ces années.*

Doris didn't change my life, but she helped refine it. She made huge assumptions about women in those days: if they were intelligent, of course they were feminists. By the time I met her in the 1960s, I knew I was a feminist but Doris made it seemed normal to be one.

Remember in those days everyone seemed to hate us. We were freaks. At parties husbands would hiss, and women would go ballistic at anyone who professed to believe in Women's Liberation. I was doing a series for CBC called People's Liberation but the show was really only about women and you could get a real going over socially.

Then I went to work for *Chatelaine* in 1970. You didn't necessarily have to be a feminist to be a member of the staff. It wasn't required by any means, you just absorbed Doris's ideas like an osmotic transfer. I remember once seeing her at the movies (she loved going to movies and went alone, in the afternoon, or in the early evening—any time she could shoehorn them in). It was M\*A\*S\*H\* with Donald Sutherland, a Canadian actor we both admired.

I was sitting on the aisle with my husband, laughing my head off when I saw Doris stomp out of the theatre hissing: "This is unbearable, it's so sexist." I muttered: "But it's reflecting the way things were." It didn't occur to me that it wasn't acceptable to just go along with something like that, even a movie, without thinking about it. I stopped laughing and saw the movie for what it was: agonizingly sexist. Doris never said another word about it. And certainly not at work.

So in normalizing feminism in my life, she also extended my feminism. I was going through consciousness-raising sessions with women friends, discussing orgasms and other highly personal things none of us had talked about before. We didn't think to ask Doris to join us, though we did ask Rosie Abella (now a Justice of the Supreme

Court). We were such babies. That feminism could be a real revolution, and not just about how we felt about ourselves and our bodies—these were the ideas supplied by Doris—at least in my life. She was my editor for four years. I was what would now be called the Life Style Editor but then was called the Service Editor. A job for which I was probably unsuited but Doris needed someone who could write copy quickly and turn the usual service stuff into something readable.

Michele Landsberg and I would gather in Michele's office and smoke yet another cigarette before we got on with the work of the magazine. This included the staff meeting in Doris's office (with her usual nail-painting sessions as she said: "Okay kids, whadda ya got?"). She was always just coming back from, or going off to, some big deal meeting or conference in Ottawa (her husband David was a well connected Liberal lawyer) and we thought it was just part of her job to be political since Doris was political in the most basic sense, but she didn't bring it to work.

She didn't care what you wore, or what your politics were. She cared about her staff in an almost motherly way. As a consequence, I have never worked in an office where I was so unaware of office politics. Where you could actually go to the boss and discuss things. Where if the discussion went on after work (and we had proper hours), we'd get into Doris's car (a terrifying experience) and head over to her place for a drink.

It was so much fun. It was always fun around Doris even when she was being profoundly serious about her most fundamental principles. She never labeled them "feminism," she never discussed it as first-wave or second-wave anything. And she sent a male off to do the first piece on the feminist movement (who also happened to be my husband Jack Batten). Other feminists complained but Doris wanted his perspective on what was happening, assuming of course that he too was a feminist (which he was).

She took risks like that all the time. And she never made a big deal out of them either. And there was certainly

never any feeling that you were knocking back a glass of scotch with one of the great dames of our time. Apart from her ideas, Doris was so womanly. She adored many men though she admired few. She saw their flaws and loved them anyway. She was crazy about her sons. She had a huge appetite for everything from clothes to a really good meal. She was a sensualist who loved to discuss sex just as much as she did politics. And she was utterly discreet. You could tell her anything and be confident that is where it stayed and it never came back to bite you in the ass.

She could be your best girl friend, the best boss, the best person to use as a measuring stick for how well you are doing at being human. She was just so much larger than life in so many ways that the gap she leaves is immeasurable. *Pace* Doris.

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*Doris Anderson and son, Steve, in the garden, c1978.*

## HOW TO LIVE – EXCITINGLY

*Chatelaine*, Editorial, April 1974

“You must lead such an exciting life,” people often say to me, and while I murmur something suitably polite a small quiet voice inside says, “Exciting? It’s downright foolhardy—but not quite the way you imagine.”

Like many another woman, I am an intrepid, reckless gambler with time. I have a Don Quixote approach to life. I believe that with luck and pluck I’ll pull through somehow and that I can always squeeze one more task into a chock-a-block list of things I have to do in the next hour.

And so my triumphs in life are cavalier feats I manage to pull off that almost no one knows about. A triumph? It’s when I do my derring-do juggling act of manoeuvring my key out of my purse and into the lock without dropping the eggs, my briefcase, my purse or three shopping bags.

It’s on 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....

Triumph is putting on a bold and confident aspect as you mount a podium, while you know you’ve just sprung a half-inch ladder down the back of your stocking.

It’s making a wild guess at someone’s name when we meet—and getting it right.

It’s one of those rare occasions when the whole family appear scrubbed, combed, neat and orderly—and *you* don’t discover that your heel has come off and *you’ve* got lipstick on your teeth.

....It’s a time when you’ve two minutes to make an appointment and miraculously there’s a spot to park right where you need it—and with incredible luck you also have the right change for the meter.

It’s making a Heavily Parental Speech and marching resolutely to the door without tripping on the rug or having the door handle come off in your hands.

It’s hoarding half an hour to oneself at the end of an evening without the dog wanting out, or someone pattering down for another glass of water, or the sound of a tap dripping somewhere....

It’s writing an editorial and getting it in—puff, puff—dead on time.

*Doris Anderson, Editor*