

This Just In – Happy Valley, Labrador

MARILYN CHURLEY

L'auteur raconte sa découverte des collections de magazines "Chatelaine" dans le grenier de ses grands-parents à Terre-Neuve quand elle les visitait, étant adolescente. Les articles qu'elle y a lus pendant des années ont façonné sa vie et lui ont donné le courage à 15 ans, de s'exprimer sur les différents modèles établis pour les garçons et les filles.

Little did I know when I was reading *Chatelaine* Magazine as a teenager in Happy Valley that one day I would not only get to meet Doris Anderson but work with her in "Equal Voice" in her quest to get more women elected and to even share many a glass of wine with her in her home.

Happy Valley was an isolated little village carved out of the middle of nowhere to service the American military base in Goose Bay, Labrador. There were no roads in or out. When the snow fell and Hamilton River froze over, even our access to travel by boat was stopped. Flying was the only option but we didn't do much of that. Of course there were local roads that got us to and from the base and around "the valley" as we called it if the snow ploughs could get through. In the winter many families still used dog sleds to travel between Happy Valley, North West River, Mud Lake, and other local villages. We were shut out of the mainstream in most every way—so thank God for CBC—even though the hockey games were broadcast on television a day late. Though we were behind in the latest fashions, I'm sure life was lived as everywhere else in North America. Mothers stayed home; fathers went to work and when they came home, ruled the roost. There was spousal abuse, sexual abuse, discrimination against the Inuit and First Nations, poverty, and lots of gossip about those women and girls who didn't conform.

My parents were from the island of Newfoundland and most years when school was finished we would get on the boat and sail around the coast of Labrador and Newfoundland to spend half the summer in my mother's home of Bay De Verde and the rest with my paternal grandparents in Old Perlican. Nanny and Poppy Churley lived in a typical

Newfoundland salt-and-pepper house with a spectacular view of the ocean. There were fields, wild rose bushes, a deep well, an outhouse, and a big old barn with a loft that you had to climb up a rickety ladder to get to. That's where I discovered *Chatelaine* and Doris Anderson.

It was the 1960s—I was a disgruntled and restless young teen waiting for something to happen. And then it did in a way I never imagined. One summer I went up into the loft in the barn and found boxes and boxes of old magazines, most of which were *Reader's Digest*, *Homemaker's* and Christian tracts. While leafing through them I came across copies of *Chatelaine* and saw articles about things I'd never heard anyone talk about before, let alone see printed on a page. I was stunned, perplexed, and very excited. There were stories about sex, abortion, lesbians, spousal and child abuse, and poverty. But what intrigued me most were the stories about feminism and equality and fairness for women. I hauled a pile of them over to the open space that was used to pitch hay in and out of loft and that's where I spent the rest of my vacation. Reading and re-reading and staring out over the ocean.

These articles shaped my life from then on. For the first time I thought "it's not just me" who was resentful that boys got to do more than girls; that even in snow drifts up to our waists and 40 degrees below 0 temperatures, girls were not allowed to wear trousers in the classroom. Because of those articles, I felt emboldened to take stands against the status quo. When I got back home to Happy Valley I continued to read *Chatelaine* and would hide them under my mattress along with the trashy *True Romance* magazines I wasn't supposed to read. I started rebelling in small ways.

When I was 15 and in Grade 10, I won the Labrador girls' speaking contest (that was pretty monumental because I beat the stuck-up girls from the American and Canadian bases), which meant I was the Labrador representative at the final contest in St. John's. It was after I read the rules for the boys and girls speaking contest that I took my first

bold stand as a feminist. My choice of topic was “It’s a Man’s World” and although written in a humorous style it was scathing in its criticism of the different standards set for the boys and girls contests which were identical in every way EXCEPT when it came to the prizes. You see, the winner of the boy’s contest got a trophy, a trip to Ottawa, and \$100. The winner of the girls got ... a trophy.

I couldn’t believe it! I was hopping mad and used that blatantly sexist situation to set the table for a speech about appalling equalities in women’s lives. I got a standing ovation by the men’s only rotary club who sponsored the contest and they were clapping and cheering throughout. They loved it—but I didn’t win. The sweet girl from Labrador City who spoke about being a good Christian was clearly their favourite and she got ... the trophy. It’s true they didn’t change the rules at the time either, but the point was made.

If I hadn’t read those articles in *Chatelaine* I never would have had the nerve to present such a speech. And perhaps I never would have had the nerve to pursue a different kind of life than the one my parent’s had mapped out for me—to get married and become a housewife.

Years later I ran for Toronto City Councillor as a feminist and environmentalist. One of the first things I did after winning my seat was to get majority support to change our titles from Alderman to Councillor. And as Chairwoman of the City Cycling Committee I successfully fought for equal prize money for female racers who were getting just a fraction of what the male winners got. I got death threats but I got it through. *Ha! Vindication!*

I’ll bet that unbeknownst to me, other women and girls in Happy Valley were being secretly subverted by *Chatelaine* and Doris Anderson’s editorials too while they primly prepared meals from the recipes.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why Old Maids Are

Women who are spinsters have usually had proposals of marriage. I know only one who probably hasn’t (she never stopped talking long enough to listen to one). The majority of married women, especially the younger ones, have usually married the first man who asked them. Women are spinsters for many reasons, often because they will not settle for second best.

—Name withheld, Gananoque, Ont.,



Doris, 1971.

HOW WE STACK THE CARDS AGAINST BOTH SEXES

Chatelaine, Editorial, February 1968

As the concerned mother of three small boys, I am gradually becoming aware of a topsy-turvy world I never suspected existed when I was growing up. All through the early grades, like a monotonous dirge, I hear the refrain from conscientious, earnest educators, “of course, he’s a boy and naturally he’s lagging behind the girls.” The extent of a young male’s ineptitude is well documented—six months to a year behind little girls in achievement....

Surely there must be a breakthrough when these blundering boys, in the manner of Clark Kent, don Superman costumes and zoom far ahead of females?

But no! The sorry story goes on. Boys account for more high school dropouts. They cause more trouble, supply more delinquents, etc., etc.

I am dumbfounded. When, then, do boys overtake girls? How is it that the world I live in is run almost entirely by men with docile women underlings carrying out their orders? What happens to transform all these blockheads into the captains of industry, cabinet ministers, doctors, lawyers, architects, and engineers? Even in professions where women far outnumber men, such as teaching, banking, social work, we find millions of women minions and few [fe]male bosses....

And what a waste! We’re throwing away at least half of our intellectual potential because only a handful of bright girls ever get into the professions, civic life or government. But far worse than the waste—we’re locking ourselves into mental attitudes that limit and diminish both sexes in every aspect of our lives.

Doris Anderson, Editor