

The End of the Beginning

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L'auteure se rappelle Doris Anderson et l'aide qu'elle lui a apportée quand elle est devenue rédactrice en chef du magazine Homemaker. Elle décrit leur amitié qui a duré 19 ans, son rôle de mentor et la grande perte qu'elle ressent depuis l'annonce de sa mort.

The subject line in the e-mail from Michele Landsberg read R.I.P. Doris Anderson. A verbal gasp. A moment's denial. A wish for one more visit, another piece of advice, a reassuring word. The cyber space message was reverberating, I knew, all across the nation and to various corners of the world. Our warrior was down. The news didn't set off the shock wave that a tragic death might have. After all, Doris Anderson was 85 years old. She'd been sick for a while, tied for months to an oxygen bottle that she hated. The words in the e-mail were instead like the long mournful tolling of a bell that announced an era was over. To the women who worked and played with Doris, this was also the end of the beginning of our finest hour. Doris Anderson had changed the way an entire country regards 52 per cent of its population—the women and girls.

I sat at my desk reading the message over and over again. Although the medical facts stood for themselves, how could it be that the voice of the woman who led us, taught us, altered our futures was now silent? Her very heartbeat had thumped the drum of revolution. She'd been an icon for most of her adult life.

Like most women in Canada, my association with Doris Anderson began when I was a reader of *Chatelaine* and a student awakening to the injustices of my gender. It was the '60s. At my college dormitory, the girls had curfews, the boys didn't. The girls wore uniforms, the boys didn't. When a senior student became pregnant while I was a freshman, she left the campus in disgrace, went to an unwed mother's home and was never seen again. Her boyfriend strutted around the campus like the cock of the walk. Women across the country were railing against the unfair rules of society and looking for a leader who would tackle



Doris Anderson, 1990s.

this injustice. Doris Anderson was that leader.

Over the years as the movement grew and the rumblings of change interrupted polite dinner parties and ultimately turned into rallies, I followed my hero's clarion call for change. As a journalist I saw her at editorial functions. As a feminist, I picked up her torch and tried to carry the fire farther out from her blazing centre.

It wasn't until I became editor-in-chief of *Homemaker's Magazine* in 1988 that I actually got to know Doris. I remember that time as though it was yesterday. The event was a book launch at publisher Anna Porter's home. I hung around the edges of the circle that surrounded Doris and

listened to the famous gravelly voice—holding court—all the while trying to muster up the nerve to talk to her. I needed her advice about the editorial plan I had for *Homemaker's Magazine*. But asking to speak to her was, for me, akin to butting in on Mick Jagger or Queen Elizabeth. At last, I screwed up the courage and said, "Doris, I wonder if we could talk some time about *Homemaker's*." In her famous drawl she replied immediately, "Sure Saaally, I'd like that. Let's have lunch tomorrow." That was the thing about Doris. She always had time, never let you feel you were interrupting her busy schedule and always listened thoughtfully and replied fulsomely. For the next 19 years she was there for me as a mentor and a dear friend in good times and bad. The lesson she taught me about magazines was this: if you have the readers, you can follow your editorial dream. The publisher won't stop you because the reader numbers will bring in the advertisements and that, at the end of the day, is what the proprietor wants. "Just do it," she said, and added in her delightful tongue-in-cheek hyperbole, "It'll be faaabulous."

She had a way of pushing you forward and drawing you in when she had a plan that required editorial support. I remember walking with her on the beach at her cottage in Prince Edward Island, marveling at the sea and the sand, basking in the sunshine, and commenting about how lucky we both were to have cottages in the Maritimes. I no sooner formed the thought about how pensive and spiritual she was about our surroundings when she said in her vintage-Doris style, "Saaally, someone's got to raise more hell about proportional representation."

The package that was Doris Anderson also included compassion, understanding, and the gift of knowing. If you were in trouble, she would be there emitting that strength of hers, bathing you in her powerful support and holding you steady until you found your feet, which she expected you to find in due course.

I can see her yet, standing tall, chin tucked in, hands with beautifully manicured fingernails folded low, her face full of observation and that knowing. What a dame. What a gift she was to Canada.

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SYLVIA SPRING

Doris Poem

Things I learned from her:
 Being a little nobody with more chutzpa
 than smarts
 Meant little to her
 She talked to me as an equal
 At first it was about strategies
 Hers but by inference mine
 For navigating the mine field of male
 Privilege and female savvy

How to handle them
 Or not when they asked for the unacceptable
 How pretense was part of the game
 I called it chutzpa, she – getting the job done
 Other lessons during our stint together on
 a task force
 The advertising & media boys trying to
 demonize
 Feminism – they failed and we
 Developed a fine feminist humour
 A legacy – our legacy for survival

But she has left us
 And the struggle is not over
 Nor her influence on my and Canadian
 Women's lives...
 She made sure of that when she walked
 Out on Lloyd and the boys that fateful day
 Back when we were all trying to find
 the humour
 In being un-personed

By supporting her those days I gained a
 new respect
 For integrity in the face of huge personal risk
 And I lost an old "friend" who called
 me traitor
 But we all survived and became "personed"
 On valentine's day ... what humour in
 that irony
 What a woman
 What a friend
 What a mentor
 What a farewell celebration!

Sylvia Spring is a life long communication through many mediums – radio, films, words/print – now stone, wood, clay, and occasional poetry. www.sylvia.spring.com.