

but her rebellious marriage was only the beginning of a long life together—43 years, three children, two grandchildren and mutually successful careers: “Despite her early aversion to conventional roles, Michele turned into an extravagantly and joyously maternal adult who loves cooking and gardening.”

Susan Whelehan who, with Anne Laurel Carter, edited *My Wedding Dress*, wrote in her introduction of the genesis of the book: “A few years ago, a group of women friends who love to write sat around the table in my house and took turns calling out topics and writing for ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. Then we read our pieces aloud. At one point I called out, “your wedding dress—Go!” From such a beginning this book developed, the product of many different voices and experiences. Taken singly or together they are beacons of hopeful beginnings for all the various women who read and those who wrote them.

Clara Thomas was one of the two first women to be hired by York University. She has been with York since 1961, the year Glendon opened. She is now a retired Professor Emeritus. In 2005 York did her the honour of naming the libraries' Archives and Special Collections the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, York University.

ONE DAY IT HAPPENS

Mary Lou Dickinson
Toronto: Inanna Publications and
Educations Inc, 2007

REVIEWED BY LEE GOLD

Mary Lou Dickinson has created a rich and varied first collection of short stories, *One Day It Happens*. They reveal a full range of human



struggles, not purely feminine ones. These modern stories touch on issues of woman abuse, alcoholism, divorce, homosexuality, child sexual abuse, and mental illness. No longer forbidden topics, they still bring pain, shame, fear and, too often, silence. However these stories bear no resemblance to political tracts or diatribes. They do what good fiction does best: reveal the human condition in its endless permutations, differences, horrors, pleasures, and contradictions.

The narrator ranges from first person to third, from male to female and young to old. But always there remains an ability to find significance, humor, irony, or menace in small moments, brief encounters and prolonged friendship. A young child draws a house, surrounded by trees, on the lid of her father's cardboard coffin; a lecherous old man seeks out a new arrival in a nursing home to revive his lost sexual prowess. The stories challenge the reader to examine moments of adventure, to be open to connection as well as to fear and even death.

The collection has a rhythm, a structure that helps to make the darkness of several stories bearable. It can be read as a fugue of sorts, orchestrated to frighten, amuse, repulse and even, delight. The reader gets taken on a journey over time.

Some stories are directly informed by the writer's work as a crisis line counselor: “Slides from Exotic Places” and “From the Front,” fictional accounts of such experiences, reveal the toll this work takes on one's body and spirit as well as the kinds of issues that arise in the course of a single shift. “The Essay” vividly portrays the mind of a woman whose sense of self has been so severely traumatized as a child that she has to struggle every moment to hold together the splintered pieces as a fragmented adult.

The stories are far from repetitive nor are they all bleak. Two, especially, stand out for their deft touch, wry humour, and self mockery. “Neighbours,” about the deaths, a year apart, of two gay men from AIDS is as sensitive a telling of the ravages of this disease and the prejudices of a homophobic society as one could wish for. The other, very different in the telling as well as the subject, consists of PERSONALS, both his and hers. The reader witnesses the shift from an effort to find a companion, albeit playfully, to a woman simply finding pleasure in self-revelation over the space of a few years and giving up on finding “Mr. Right.” These stories arrive when the reader needs a bit of relief: ironic light cast into the shadows of the more prevalent darkness of human experiences.

I struggled with one story in particular, a mad or perhaps not so mad, woman living in her fantasy world or acting out for the sheer adventure of it. I could never quite tell whether it worked or not. But the pleasure of such a collection lies in its variety, enough to satisfy a broad readership. Mavis Gallant once said she thought short stories should be read singly, with time in between. For me it depends on the writer and, of course, the stories. I read these three or four at a time over the course of a few days. None are very long but each feels complete. Only two involve the same characters.

The writing does not draw attention to itself; the stories occupy centre stage. The style lends itself to

the tale told without embellishment, simile or metaphor. (I noticed one and it felt discordant.) The voice feels consistent throughout even as it changes from first to third person, female to male, dialogue to Personal Ads to description. This versatility helps to keep the stories interesting and engaging, as varied as the subject matter. This is the work of a mature writer who has mastered her craft as she observes and experiences the world around her. Landscapes she inhabits or visits become characters in the stories as well: the North, rural France, Toronto, an apartment with a child's drawings on the ceiling and her dying father in a bed beneath them.

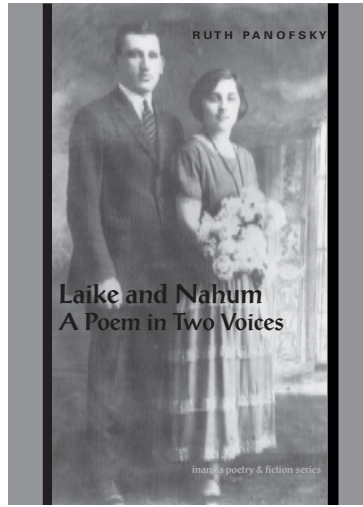
The cumulative effect of this collection will leave the reader with an increased understanding of a variety of states of mind, human interactions and experience. If fiction can transport us into worlds others inhabit, these stories succeed brilliantly. The book is entitled, *One Day it Happens*, but it could also be called, *What We All Long For*—safety and a connection with others—and it should be read.

Lee Gold grew up outside Boston surrounded with books and married a reader. They raised two readers who spawned more readers. Books, ideas, politics, especially anti-violence work from war to intimate femicide and women's safety has fueled her life so far. She longs for the chance to collapse into an easy chair with my latest mountain of unread books and imagine the contours of a more peaceful and equitable world.

LAIKE AND NAHUM: A POEM IN TWO VOICES

Ruth Panofsky
Toronto: Inanna Publications and
Education Inc., 2007

REVIEWED BY CAROL
LIPSYCZ



In *Laike and Nahum, A Poem in Two Voices*, Ruth Panofsky unfolds the joined life narratives of Laike and Nahum, her familial and imaginatively configured subjects. Weaving past and present together in a lyrical and unstinting voice, the poet re-enacts transitional moments in her grandparents' married lives, which come to signify the core of those lives. We recognize the universal from the distinct historical legacy the poet evokes in three parts: the hesitant, hungry dance of young love; the immigrant experience and its recriminations; and, in a circle of small blessings, the couple's ultimate reserve of love.

Laike and Nahum's voices are like a dance of dialogue. In Part I, we first greet, through the eyes of sixteen-year-old Laike, the transplanted suitor who arrives "with the hardened mud/of Russia" on his boots. Laike sees and identifies with the contradictions inherent in

Nahum: his foreign awkwardness and steady stature, his harsh past and gentle nature. A mingling of intimate dialects and voices emanate from the pair too: the homespun Jewish vernacular (originating point for both characters), and through reported speech, the cautionary, judgmental voices of Laike's parents who do not approve of the match. As Nahum begins to toil in the garment sweatshops, Laike acknowledges the severe limits and inequities of their small world, inadvertently speaking for teeming immigrants who landed on Canadian shores. She asks of her future husband, "did you cross oceans/for so little?" In *Nahum*, we feel empathy for the newly-landed immigrant caught in spirit and body between the haunting memories of an unforgiving Russia motherland and a less-than-welcoming new land, *ile Montreal*, upon which he has pinned his hopes and dreams. Only through his tender and passionate love for Laike can he temporarily escape the "haze of heat and steam" and be made "whole."

In Part II, Laike's roles as mother, wife, and subsistence co-provider soon consume her. With the succession of children and unrelenting poverty, comes shame. In a poignant moment, when Laike attests to the scrubbing of flats for strangers, and concedes to her daughter's shunning of her, she asks Nahum: "what pride have I?" Ruth Panofsky affords her grandmother these words; Laike is given this small space to voice her self-sacrifice. Greater trials await the couple. With the tragic death of a child from a fall onto the pavement, Laike is temporarily hospitalized. The poet paints images on a surreal palate to chronicle trauma and its devastating effects. Laike "dreams of children/plummeting/through pitch of night/buried by dawn." Nahum, who lives under his own "arc of loss," is compelled to relay to the reader the coroner's detached report of his son's graphic injuries. However, Nahum goes on to reveal, in stark language laced with a strychnine dose of irony,