

Helen MacMurchy, one of the first generation of women to be qualified as medical doctors. The National Council of Women strongly endorsed MacMurchy's work. Further, he points to "Nellie McClung, Judge Emily Murphy, Henrietta Edwards, among others, who believed sterilization was a panacea for society's ills." Emily Murphy's book, *The Black Candle* is an extended rant against the acceptance of Asians as emigrants to Canada. These are the women we honour every year as we celebrate Persons' Day. The sad lesson to be learned is of course plain: not one of us, no matter how convinced her feminism, how sensitive her humanity, can escape the context of her life and times. Are we unwittingly assenting to as grave an injustice as was suffered by Velma Demerson? *The Incurrigibles*, I believe, should be mandatory reading in every Women's Studies course in the land

*Clara Thomas was one of the two first women to be hired by York. She has been with York since 1961, the year Glendon opened. She is now a retired Professor Emeritus.*

## **SURVIVING IN THE HOUR OF DARKNESS: THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF WOMEN OF COLOUR AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN**

G. Sophie Harding, Ed.  
Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005

### **REVIEWED BY CHERYL VAN DAALEN-SMITH**

How glorious to be greeted by Byllye Avery as she provides the forward to Harding's second career anthology.

Co-founder of the Black Women's Health Project in the United States, Byllye Avery celebrates Harding and her contributors as an important component in the current women's health movement. *Surviving in the Hour of Darkness*, as Avery states "is a journey into health and healing, as women tell us in detail how racism penetrates the health care system and compromises our health and well-being." This text opens with perspectives on health in the Diaspora providing rich first-person narratives and arguments pertaining to oppression, resilience, and resistance. From Black women's health in Nova Scotia, to African Canadian women's re-claimed self-healing approaches to mental health, the first section sets an inarguable foundation from which to understand some of the systemic barriers facing Women of Colour and Indigenous Women.

In the second section, "Her-Story: Living with Illness," thirty authors and poets weave stories of silence and voice, fear and courage, object and subject, named and naming. Through poetry, prose and essays, *how* these women are surviving with illness is illuminated. The lushness of the diversity of lives lived is found in a section on contributors. Again, written in the first-person, these autobiographical notes provided by the contributors were as enlightening and profound as their core contributions. The anthology begs health and social service providers, policy makers, academics, educators, women and partners to pause ... in order to understand health as defined and lived by the woman living it. In addition, to view and understand women as social actors in the world, with the right to name health and illness *in their own way*, is critical.

Harding situates this anthology as an attack against the systemic barriers, forced silencing, untold stories, and the unheard voices of women. I believe it transcends that. For in this anthology there is light, not darkness. There is hope, anger, re-claiming, and wisdom. This anthology transcends

the boundaries of attack. It opens up the health and lives of Women of Colour and Indigenous Women for all to see—and it does so without apology. It invites us to do what is right with these urgent, truthful, and painful gifts of prose. Systemic and attitudinal shift is critical. No longer is it o.k. for Women of Colour and Indigenous Women to have differential access to health and quality health care in comparison to other women. In fact, it's never been o.k., but has rarely been spoken about in Canada. Organizations like Women's Health in Women's Hands *must* have their work supported and sustainably funded. Community-based women's health programs are wise. Their programming is determined by the needs of the women they serve and *not* by mainstream (white) dominant models that not only deny differential access but are complicit in maintaining this inequity.

Harding hoped that this text would be a podium for Women of Colour and Indigenous Women. Harding's hopes, I would argue, have been met and then some. To name and re-claim definitions of health and wellness is emancipatory. But to have a forum to do so unapologetically was an enormous assurance Harding provided. As noted by Avery, the women whose narratives envelop readers of *Surviving in the Darkness* are no longer in the dark. Their stories are full of light and light a path towards transcendence. This text is a celebration of life, health and wisdom. It is a podium—wrapped in cedar and sage—from which its readers can now go forward—in good company and in the light.

*Cheryl van Daalen-Smith is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Health and in the School of Women's Studies at York University.*