

During the early to mid 70's, the feminist movement was just starting to pick up energy in Toronto. In 1972, at The Women's Place, a small corner was devoted to print material by for and about women. By 1973, the "bookstore" moved to 12 Kensington, along with a printing press and self defense collective. Marie and I joined the store as volunteers in 1974 and shortly afterwards became the co-ordinators.

By the time we moved the Toronto Women's Bookstore to its stand alone home at 85 Harbord St, at the beginning of 1975, there was an absolute explosion of materials published specifically to help women looking for alternative ways to live our lives. Many of the books and records were made available by women owned and run publishers such as the Women's Press in Toronto and Daughters, Diana and Naiad Press from the USA.

Of course we faced many challenges, not the least of which was lack of funds. None of us had much retail experience, but business was slow enough to learn day by day. We really had no bookselling mentors and many of our professional colleagues did not acknowledge us at first. As well, it was difficult to establish credibility with the publishers and the book buying public. Many women had little money and in fact some didn't understand why we needed to sell the books at retail rather than wholesale prices.

Of course, there were always hundreds if not thousands of opinions about how the store should be run and that could often be challenging too. I'm sure some of the other speakers this evening will touch on some of those times.

The joys were many-

So many women who came through the door felt their lives were deeply touched and enriched by their experiences at TWB. The books they could find at 85 were not "gettable" else where and there was much excitement about treasures found. We often had a store full of women from out of town, just passing through Toronto, perhaps on their way to Michigan. Quite often, authors and musicians stopped by and that was pretty thrilling.

In 1975, International Women's Year, government funding became available for the public libraries and educational institutions to build up lending libraries full of books about feminism and women's issues and sales improved dramatically. Of course, Women's Studies profs from U of T and York supported the store and that allowed us to expand and flourish as well.

From 1979-1981 TWB co-sponsored a series called Writers in Dialogue which brought together a Canadian and an American author for an evening of readings and discussion. This series was very successful and well received.

In 1983, the building we were in, was sold and we were to have new neighbours upstairs. As it turned out, it was to become the Morgentaler Clinic. We should have realized at the time, that we would be much more vulnerable to anti-abortion activity, and we should have had a better alarm system. We didn't and on July 29<sup>th</sup> an arsonist broke in to the bookstore intending to burn down the clinic. The fire was set in the store and all of our stock and fixtures were destroyed. I'll never forget the feeling of standing out on Harbord St watching the end of the fire and seeing everything drenched in water. 9 yrs of love, hard work and history almost entirely destroyed in an hour.

With the widespread help of the women's community, and the bookselling community the store was slowly rebuilt.

A year after the women's bookstore reopened in its new home at 73 Harbord, Marie and I concluded it was time for the structure of how the store was run, to change. We left with heavy hearts in 1985 after 11 yrs.

Victoria is the last link in the chain of many women who have contributed to the success and longevity of TWB. We admire her courage in endeavoring to breathe new life into the store. However as any independent bookseller will tell you, it's a very trying and difficult time to be in this business.