

Judy Rebick is a feminist [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Judy Rebick is a feminist. And proud to say so. In a time when some women fear the radical bra-burning, man-hating connotations of this particular F-word, Rebick wears it with dignity. After reading her book, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Penguin; \$24), other women may choose to reclaim the title.

"Feminism has become a dirty word," said Rebick, in Victoria as part of a national book tour. "We didn't used to call ourselves feminists. We were 'women's liberationists' and they started calling us 'women's libbers,' and that became a dirty word. So we went to 'feminist.' Any name that you call yourself when you fight for equality and change, the media and government turns into a dirty word. So you might as well call yourself what you want."

Rebick's book is all about the fight for equality and change. It is an oral history, or "collective memoir," documenting the "second wave of feminism" that started in the U.S. in 1963 with the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*. In Canada, the second wave started a few years earlier, and it lasted much longer, said Rebick.

While the American women's movement died out in 1980, in Canada, it continued well into the '90s, in the wake of the Montreal Massacre. The event considered the conclusion to the Canadian second wave was a massive 1995 protest march from Montreal to Quebec City to demand the elimination of poverty.

During that march, "one man was so inspired that he brought 10,000 roses to Quebec City for the huge rally that greeted the marchers," writes Rebick in her introduction. "It is from this story that my book takes its title."

In *Ten Thousand Roses*, Rebick pays brief homage to the first wave feminists the suffragettes - then gives voice to more than 80 women who were active in the second wave in Canada. The book addresses access to abortion, childcare, equal pay for work of equal value, violence against women and the rights of disabled women, women of colour and aboriginal women.

"There's been an enormous achievement, especially in attitude," said the author, a Toronto-based writer, broadcaster, political commentator and publisher of *rabble.ca*. "When I was young, women were considered to be inferior to men. I think some men still think that. But I don't know any woman now who thinks she is inferior. I think attitudes have changed. I think women now have way more opportunity."

When Rebick was young, for example, women rarely worked and, if they did, they had to quit their jobs when they got married. Women couldn't have credit cards or get mortgages.

But Rebick acknowledges some things haven't changed. "We still have no national day care," she said. "There are more and more women in the workplace but they are still expected to be the primary caregivers at home."

Issues affecting aboriginal women and sex trade workers have barely been touched over the years. And, even though violence against women is no longer a secret, "it isn't decreasing," she said. "We thought empowering women and protecting them would change things. But it hasn't. I think we need a new discussion on that."

And at least one thing has changed for the worse for women the attitude toward beauty and body image. "Now you have to be competent in the workplace, take good care of the house, be a good mom and you have to be thin and gorgeous as well," says the former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

Rebick started writing *Ten Thousand Roses* three years ago, after veteran feminist Kay Macpherson died. "I thought it was important that her generation of women, that their stories not be lost."

At the same time, she read a history of the grassroots American feminist movement. "I thought the Canadian women's movement was way more interesting than the American one, way broader and way more successful and yet, all our popular cultural references were American."

In the voices in *Ten Thousand Roses*, the reader hears the excitement of the time, the organized outcry, the sense of revolution that comes

with banding together for major change. That's something that doesn't happen to the same degree today, said Rebick, who hopes her book will inspire young women to launch a third wave of feminism.

"Instead of the rush of change we see when there's an organized movement, we now see very slow change," she said. "The second wave of feminism is over. And before I went out on the road (on the book tour), I thought the third wave hadn't happened yet.

"But the reaction I'm getting to this book from young women is so strong that it's telling me it's already started. I feel more optimistic that there is emerging a new feminism and it has to be a new feminism because we're in a different world now."

- reprinted from CanWest News Service

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