

The Women's Writing Collective

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Un Collectif d'écrivaines

Un collectif d'écrivaines à Toronto: des femmes qui partagent leurs connaissances et se soutiennent dans un atelier d'écriture.

'Too many times, women go to a creative-writing course and get bogged down on technicalities. Sometimes their creativity suffers in the process. They wind up feeling that because they can't say what it is they have inside them in a manner which satisfies the instructor, they have failed. Women are coming through a critical period, a developing period. Many of them write about changing values in the loneliness of their homes. They write about their reactions, but, it is done in a vacuum.'

Betsy Warland Van Horn,
Toronto *Star*, January 1975.

The Women's Writing Collective began with one woman's need to share her work and to explore it with other women. An article in the Toronto *Star* and several posters in bookstores resulted in an overwhelming response. In January 1975 over a hundred women writers formed a group, and the Women's Writing Collective was born.

The Collective consists of women who write poetry, short stories, novels, children's poetry and stories, filmscripts, articles, and plays. They range in age from sixteen to sixty-five years and have come from a wide variety of backgrounds. These are women who felt isolated writing in their homes, and wanted to give support to other women writers who felt the same. Since women's work is often thought of as being inferior to men's, these women needed a non-threatening, non-judgemental situation both to receive and to give peer criticism. Many of them had never let anyone read their work before. Many had never even told anyone that they wrote. Often they felt that their work was not 'good enough' to be published and most of them would *never* refer to themselves as writers. That is, not when they first came into the collective. Our society teaches us that what women do and how they feel is uneventful, uninteresting, and quite unimportant. Therefore, women believe that the content of their work consists of these negative things and that they have nothing interesting to say. The Collective feels strongly that the criticism and feedback, along with the sharing and support within the group, encourage women to value themselves, their existence, and the power of their creativity.

Realizing this and exploring it within a small group has been very beneficial to our work, and the Collective will continue to organize writing sessions for women writers in Toronto. Each small group consists of about six to ten women, meeting weekly either for a definite period of time or indefinitely — the choice is made by the group members. There is no leader, only a facilitator to help it get going. There is no structure. Rather the sessions are a sharing of writing, followed by immediate feedback, individual reaction, suggestions for improvement, and constructive criticism. The sessions provide stimulating encouragement, a relaxing atmosphere, and supportive empathy for women who write. It is not a creative-writing course. It is a means for women to create opportunities in which they can help each other technically and support each other emotionally. When some of the women did gain confidence and were eager to be heard they did



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something about it. They organized poetry readings in a variety of places — libraries, colleges, coffee houses.

They have encouraged one another to submit their work and some have been published in various magazines, newspapers and quarterlies. One woman has had some of her children's poems published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, and another has had her book published by McGraw-Hill.

Some of the members of the collective were involved in the publishing of three anthologies: *Women and Their Writing*, Vol. 1, 1975, Women's Writing Collective; *Women and Their Writing*, Vol. 2, 1976, Women's Writing Collective; and *Land-scape*, 1977, Women's Writing Collective.

UPSTREAM

A monthly newsmagazine published by Feminist Publications of Ottawa, a collective staff, current events and feature articles from the nation's capital.

\$ 6.00 per annum
\$15.00 institutions

Formerly English it will include French content beginning in May.

Upstream Ottawa Women's newspaper is now entering its second year of publishing. The staff and volunteer collective has taken a two month break from production to organize and begin planning for the future. A group of Ottawa Women founded Feminist Publications of Ottawa in 1976 to publish Upstream because they saw the need for communications link among all women's groups and organizations in the city. We wanted to get the news of events which affect women out of women and also give general news a feminist perspective. We are now prepared to examine a similar need on a national level. Canada could well use a national women's newspaper and Ottawa seems to be a logical base. We can't begin this enterprise, we feel, without input from women across the country.

As a member of the collective, I know that we profit from such interaction and consequently write more effectively. We are reclaiming our inherent ability to write. We are starting to respect our day-to-day experiences as powerful and significant writing material.

Through the Women's Movement we have come to value ourselves and each other. We grow together as each weekly session progresses, in our relationships as well as in our writing. We are exploring the fact that as writers, we write from a unique perspective — that of a woman.

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