individual to make the choices that affect their lives, working conditions, and employment.

All in all, in these fine essays, friends and colleagues have painted a well outlined picture of a true Canadian leader, who has made our world a better place for those who were previously powerless.

Sherrill Cheda is a second wave feminist and a retired librarian who loves literature.

INCORRIGIBLE

Velma Demerson
Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005

REVIEWED BY CLARA THOMAS

There is only one reaction to this sad story—a mixture of outrage, fury and shame. Outrage that such a thing could happen in Ontario as recently as the '30s; fury at the self-righteous condescension with which male officials and politicians determined women's fates; shame that official women and also family members were implicated in the terrible injustices done to Velma Demerson, Harry Yip, and their son. In May 1939, Velma Demerson was having breakfast with her Chinese fiancé, Harry Yip, in his room in Toronto when the police broke in and arrested her. After rough handling and a totally demeaning series of examinations and interviews she was sentenced to a year in Belmont House, a home for wayward girls, "incorrigibles" as the law called them.

As it turned out, her father, a Greek, prosperous owner of a restaurant in St. John, New Brunswick, had reported her to the police. He feared for his precious reputation if his daughter was known to have married a Chinese, which was the intention of Velma and Harry. He was divorced from her mother who lived in Toronto with Velma and her brother, who was crippled from polio. Her mother was a fortune teller and the landlady of a rooming house who led a rackety and none too moral life herself and had certainly never given her daughter any real security or guidance. Velma met a waiter at a Chinese restaurant while having a meal with her mother, went to his room with him and very soon they fell in love: "Gradually I removed myself from my mother's sphere, the bedbugs, her alcoholic boyfriend, the chaos, and my brother's condescending behaviour."

Her arrest happened a year after Velma and Harry's love began, just when she had returned from a visit to her father and when she and Harry were on the brink of marriage. She was feeling unwell and by the time the police came she knew that she was pregnant. When she appeared before a judge she told him that she would get married to the father of her child as soon as she was free, but he paid no attention and sentenced her:

> "You are charged with being 'incorrigible' and I sentence you to one year in the Belmont Home.' … How could it be that a judge, knowing I was pregnant, would refuse to allow me to marry the father of my child?

Velma's story becomes worse as the days and weeks wear on; shortly she, with a number of other girls is moved to Mercer Reformatory for Females and there she endures all the rigours of prison confinement. The girls were locked in their cells except for meals and a half-hour daily of "free" time. They were told absolutely nothing and that was the very worst of the punishment that Velma endured. When she was ordered to the prison doctor's presence she had no idea of why, nor was she given any warning of the excruciatingly painful treatments that ensued, once a week for many weeks. The doctor, Dr. Edna Guest (not her real name), bears an enormous burden of guilt for her attitude and her actions. Phyllis Chesley's recent book title, *Women's Inhumanity to Women* encapsulates her treatment totally. It was long after her release when she was a much older woman that Velma Demerson was able to look into the whole sorry situation, to find out that along with numbers of other hapless girls deemed "incorrigible," she had been subjected to both medical and drug experiments in the name of the Eugenics Movement, still powerful in the late '30s though it had begun early in the century.

Velma and Harry married on her release, but their marriage was doomed from the start. The prejudice against Chinese was still so powerful that Harry could never hope to be accepted or to support a family. Both Velma's mother and father were unremittingly hostile to the marriage and worst of all her little boy was sickly from birth and finally died in his 20s while learning to swim. He had been taken away from his mother shortly after birth and spent most of his childhood in foster care. For readers of this journal the very hardest part of the story to bear is recognizing, with agonizing helplessness, the terrible involvement of Dr. Guest and her cohorts throughout Canada. They firmly believed in the Eugenics Movement—selective breeding and the sterilization of the unfit. They enthusiastically supported the complete ostracizing of Chinese, among others, as unfit to propagate Canadian citizens. When Velma and Harry married she lost her citizenship, of course causing her great difficulties in her life thereafter. Their child could not be a Canadian citizen, nor was Harry allowed to work in anything but service industries, usually restaurants or laundries.

Allan Levine, a contemporary historian, wrote a fine social history in 2005, *The Devil in Babylon: Fear of Progress and the Birth of Modern Life*. Writing of the Eugenics Movement he reports that its first great mover and shaker in Canada was Dr.

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 Incorrigibles*, 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.

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