

Between Friends



FRIENDS OF WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWSLETTER . www.uwindsor.ca/wsvisor

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This Newsletter

By Anne Forrest

Readers of *Between Friends* are exceptionally polite. From time to time, we hear from someone who has really liked a piece but we never hear from those who find the articles boring or irrelevant.

Does this mean *Between Friends* is actually read by those who receive it? Does it mean the newsletter serves the purpose of connecting Women's Studies to our supporters on campus and in the community? As much as I would like to think the answer to these questions is "yes," I have my doubts.

So, I've been on a bit of a mission. I've been asking folks flat-out, "What did you think about the last Women's Studies newsletter?" Responses have been varied — some of my informants told me frankly that they didn't remember receiving it; others said, "Oh, fine," but were suspiciously short on details. When pressed — politely, of course — to say what they *would* find interesting, I discovered that many of our community readers would like to know more about the idea-base of Women's Studies as an academic discipline.

Fair enough. This is something we can do.

Starting with this issue the plan is to broaden the scope of the newsletter. In addition to the news and views of our students and graduates we hope to include articles about teaching Women's Studies courses and faculty research. Contributions on these topics for this issue were kindly provided by Dr. Danielle Price and Dr. Betty Barrett.

My own view is that the newsletter would be stronger if more community folks participated. Everyone I know reads books and watches films they are excited about; many of you are active in community organizing and activities. Why not send us a commentary or personal reflection about a book, film, or issue of importance to you?

We're Changing Things Up This Year

- The Community Dinner is the first event of the DV week. We hope this extra bit of advertising will encourage more community members to participate in the talks on campus. See the next page for titles, locations, and times.
- We are holding our Donor Reception right before the Community Dinner. We know everyone is busy so expect this two-in-one model will fit more schedules.
- The third change is that our Distinguished Visitor will be arriving by bicycle, she tells us! We're excited. We don't expect this to happen again soon.

Community Dinner Wednesday October 19

*Too Many Men on the Ice:
What the World Would Look Like If Don Cherry
Were a Woman*

What if a woman who spoke about the courageous fights women have every day – for equal pay, a harassment-free workplace, for reproductive choice, good daycare, for an end to violence against women, for equal opportunities on the playing field as an athlete or as an executive – dressed up in brightly coloured clothes, was paid exorbitant amounts of money by the public broadcaster, and commanded the national airwaves?

What if opera, ballet, great concerts, or women's soccer preempted the national news instead of hockey?

What would Canada look like?

What would the world look like?

Time: 5:30 p.m. Reception, 6:30 p.m. Dinner

Location: G. Caboto Club, 2175 Parent Ave.

Tickets: \$60 per individual (table of 10 = \$600) or \$15 per university/college student.

Buy tickets online at
www.uwindsor.ca/wsvisor
or call us at
519.253.3000 ext. 3727

Donor Reception Wednesday October 19

Location: G. Caboto Club, 2175 Parent Ave.

Time: 4:00 p.m.

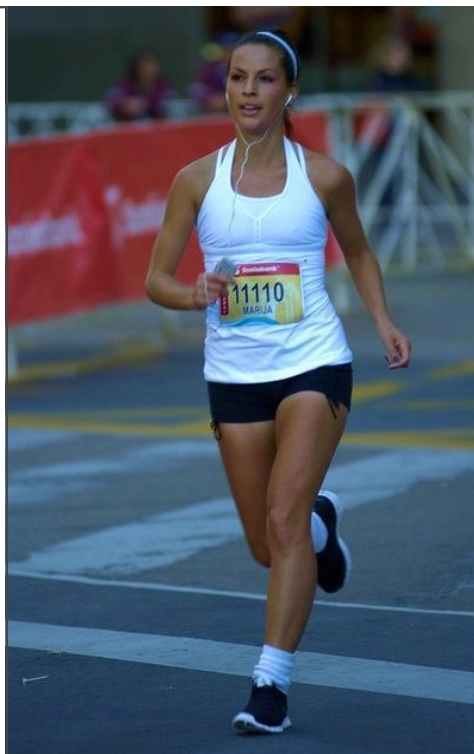
Tickets: Complimentary for 250 for \$250 members and major donors or \$250 per person.

Don't Miss Any of These Great Events

Mark Your Calendar

Why I
Would
Like to
Meet
Laura
Robinson

By Marija
Byrne



I have been asked to share why I would like to meet Laura Robinson. The simple answer to that question is that I am inspired by all that she has accomplished as both a female athlete and a feminist writer. I am able to relate to not only her love of sport, but also her quest for social justice.

Laura Robinson is a remarkable example of the level of success that can be attained when a person's life passions are cultivated, demonstrating how fulfilling life can be when you are passionate about what you are doing. But perhaps, more important than her success, is that she is doing what she is passionate about and putting forth the effort to be the best she can be...

The lesson that I personally take from Robinson's example is that any of the things that are important to me in my life do not have to detract from the other important things, but rather that they can enrich, drive and develop the others. As a female athlete, I can relate to the challenges that female athletes face, and that Robinson herself, has faced.

I can also appreciate that Laura Robinson is drawing attention to these challenges in the hopes of eliminating them. I hope you all will be as inspired by Laura Robinson's story as I have been and can apply this inspiration to cultivate your own passions in life, as I intend to do in mine.

This is why I would like to meet this year's Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies, Laura Robinson.

Marija gave this talk at the Distinguished Visitor 2011 *Sneak Preview* event on August 30. Marija was chosen because she embodies Laura Robinson's message of sport for the joy of it. She is a self-trained, long-distance runner who qualified for and finished the Boston Marathon in 2010.

To read Marija's full talk, go to:
www.uwindsor.ca/womensstudies/sneak-preview-2011

Distinguished Visitor Week of Events

Thursday October 20

Striving — Or Not — To Be the Slender Amazon

Rethinking fit, fat, and thin. What we believe about exercise matters to our health and our sense of self.

Time: 1:00 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.

Location: Chrysler Hall South, room 263

The Embodied Self

Why women and girls need to take up more room in the world.

Time: 4:00 p.m. - 6:50 p.m.

Location: CAW Student Centre, Education Gym, UWindsor

Friday October 21

Challenging Walmart in Your Home Town

The satisfactions and consequences of organizing to stop Walmart building in Sauguen Shores.

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Location: Vanier Hall, Rose Room

Saturday October 22

Girlympics: Learn from Local Athletes

Local star athletes will provide sport instruction or help accelerate your skill level.

Time: 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Location: College Ave. Community Centre, 3325 College Ave

Take Back the Night Rally and March

Time: 8:00 p.m.

Location: Waterfront at Riverside Dr. and Ouellette Ave.

All are welcome to the rally. Women and children are invited to march.

Sunday October 23

Cycling Clinic

Riding tips and help with necessary repairs for women and girls who love to cycle.

Time: 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. with ride to follow.

Location: Ojibway Park Nature Centre, 5200 Matchette Rd.

Tuesday October 25

The Lingerie Football League — and Other Insults to Women Athletes

How women are challenging the trivialization, sexualization, and exclusion of women athletes.

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 11:20 a.m.

Location: Vanier Hall, Oak Room

Sport as Social Justice

Skiing and scrapbooking with Nawash girls on the Cape Crocker Reserve.

Time: 2:30 p.m. - 3:50 p.m.

Location: Vanier Hall, Katzman Lounge

Thinking Outside the Box

Building a critique of sporting culture by listening to the voices of the excluded.

Time: 4:00 p.m. - 6:50 p.m.

Location: Vanier Hall, Katzman Lounge



The Strange Story of WWE and Me

By Betty Barrett

Photo credit: WWE.com
Fabulous Moolah was the
greatest Women's Champion of
all time.

When I tell people that I am a feminist researcher, I get a range of reactions. None, however, is quite as strong and contradictory as the reaction I get when I say I am a feminist currently researching professional wrestling, specifically, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE).

As a little girl growing up in a trailer park in Virginia, I lived for Saturday mornings. I couldn't wait for the day when the weekly wrestling shows came on television. Other girls my age begged their parents to buy them Barbie dolls and kitchen sets, but I wanted none of that.

Occasionally, when my parents had enough money for a treat, I always wanted the same thing — a wrestling magazine. On those magical days, I would run home and immediately cut out pictures of my favourite wrestlers (the Road Warriors and the Rock and Roll Express) for my wrestling photo albums. I would watch in awe as one of my favourite singers from the radio, Cindy “Girls Just Want to Have Fun” Lauper, accompanied Captain Lou Albano and Wendy Richter to the ring.

If you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, it would never have crossed my mind that being a professor was a possibility. I wanted to be a Gorgeous Lady of Wrestling.

Professional wrestling was my escape, my one true joy. Growing up in poverty as a child of teenage parents, I was unable to control the often unfortunate circumstances around me. My parents tried very hard but could not shield me from the violence I experienced at the hands of others responsible for my care when my parents were forced to work long hours at multiple jobs.

For six days a week, I felt scared and alone, but all of that changed on Saturday mornings. Every week I watched the “good guys” battle the “bad guys,” and although they would sometimes lose the match, the good guys always prevailed in the end.

I learned from this that no matter how hard you get hit, no matter how many times you get knocked down, you have the power to come back to fight another day. I learned lessons of resiliency and hope.

However trite this seems now and however suspect the source, it was the message that got me where I am today. As WWE Superstar John Cena later said so simply on his shirt, “Never Give Up.” And, due in large part to those Saturday mornings watching professional wrestling, I never did.

Looking back, I can see now that my childhood experiences of professional wrestling were seen through the rose-coloured glasses of naivety. Professional wrestling was not then, nor is it now, a bastion of women's empowerment. Those Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling that I aspired to be were objectified as sexual objects, and their “wrestling” was more valued by male viewers for its sexual titillation than its athleticism.

The women in wrestling were largely there in service of men, as girlfriends or managers — Cindy Lauper to Captain Lou Albano and Elizabeth to Macho Man Randy Savage.

Most detrimental of all was the “Attitude Era” of wrestling, which popularized storylines in which male wrestlers would punish the “bad” women in their lives through overt acts of simulated physical and sexual violence. Long after I had grown up and left wrestling behind, feminist organizations would demand boycotts of WWE for its misogynist storylines and male perpetrated violence against women.

As an adult, a feminist, and a researcher in the area of violence against women, I am deeply concerned about these damaging messages. Yet, as a child living in poverty, a victim of years of abuse and violence, these were not the messages that I saw. I saw hope.

I am often asked how I was able to overcome the circumstances of my childhood to achieve the personal and professional success I have today. One of the most profound reasons was the message of resiliency I learned watching professional wrestling.

These are the reasons I am researching professional wrestling. The WWE helped me make sense of and integrate my fragmented identity as a feminist anti-violence activist, educator, and researcher and a (former) little girl for whom watching simulated violence on Saturday mornings helped her survive the very real violence in her life.

This research project illustrates the complexities of making the personal political in my feminist activism and scholarship. Neither is as straight-forward as we might assume.



Rey Mysterio
Photo credit: Betty Barrett 2011



Anabella (on the right) with her friend Tiffany Perryman (also a Women's Studies graduate and now in second year of Midwifery at Ryerson University).

My Path to the Future By Anabella Hatami

Women's Studies provided me with a space where I belong. I am an Assyrian woman, born in Iran, and raised in Sweden. Needless to say, I know what it is like to be an outsider. I was the dark haired and brown eyed blemish in a pristine blond haired and blue eyed society.

It was clear to everyone, including me, that I did not belong. I became angry, frustrated and lost. I could not understand why I had those feelings.

Women's Studies helped me think critically about these issues and enabled me to understand how social factors affect and influence the lives of women. I was provided with the tools to conceptually understand my personal experiences and feelings.

For instance, my physical appearance differed dramatically from my peers, making me acutely aware of the cultural and ethnic differences that separated me from other young women. Women's Studies enabled me to explore the politics of differences and educated me about the unique factors that contribute to this thinking.

What I learned from my peers and professors is invaluable knowledge that I could not have gotten from anywhere else. When I think of Women's Studies, I think of equality, social justice, activism, freedom of choice, and community participation.

Today, one year after graduation, I am working as a settlement caseworker at Adult Language and Learning in Chatham, assisting newcomers in achieving equality of participation in Canadian society and trying to reduce the systemic barriers that prevent them from doing so.

My personal experiences as a newcomer in both Sweden and Canada, combined with the knowledge gained from Women's Studies, have equipped me with the skills and confidence to perform my job.

Teaching and Learning: Language and Gender By Danielle Price

When I was appointed to a Women's Studies' course on language and gender, my first thought was that this course carried the longest but certainly the most exciting title from my decade of teaching: *Nags, Housewives, and Sluts: Language and Women's Place*. The course material proved to be even more provocative than the title.

Language and Women's Place scrutinizes the political nature of language and explores how a consciousness of linguistic politics has driven key developments in feminist thought and activism. Second-wave feminists worked diligently to expose and reshape sexist language in academia and the culture more broadly; for example, the first issue of *Ms. Magazine* (1972) published Casey Miller and Kate Swift's "De-Sexing the English Language," the magazine itself emphasizing the need for a new female title and Miller and Swift's article arguing against the English language's male bias.

Other prominent feminist thinkers considered linguistic power imbalances, public and private, from the workplace and media to domestic conversations, encouraging women to claim the language as their own. More recent feminist theorists have refined and contested earlier work, training a critical eye on popular notions of female and male communication which reinscribe old stereotypes and considering how discourse contributes to the performance of gender identity.

The wide-ranging and interdisciplinary nature of the course allowed the class to consider linguistic theories connected to

gender, the role of language in gendered subject positions, and a myriad of topical issues: the case of "Baby Storm," Toronto's "Slutwalk," a Swedish preschool's decision to use gender-neutral pronouns, and media coverage of Nafissatou Diallo and Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

We also scrutinized our own conversations and encounters; once we trained ourselves to detect gendered language and stereotypes, we found them everywhere. Do women talk more than men? No! Why do we refer to animals as "he?" Often by the time we made it to our 10 a.m. class, we had ample material for discussion prefatory to and complementing our textbook reading.

We frequently returned to words used to describe women – their connotations and origins, and in some cases, their potential for rehabilitation. What of the word "girl," for example? The 1990s saw the resurrection of the word in "girl power," connecting "girl" with third-wave feminism, female assertiveness, and all-female bands.

After discussing the word, and checking its origins in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (the word originally applied to children of either sex, but later on, aside from its primary meaning of "female child" could mean a prostitute or a maid), students arrived at conflicting views: for some, the word is fine between friends; for others, the word is demeaning, implying subservience. We all agreed that context matters, and that language itself, from the smallest part of a word to the discourses that we shape and are shaped by, matters immensely.

I came to this course from years of teaching in English

(continued next page)

Teaching and Learning: Language and Gender (continued)

departments. I was used to analyzing language and texts; I certainly had taught plenty of courses on gender and literature, as well as courses on feminist theory. As a graduate student I had read and been converted by Casey Miller and Kate Swift to the importance of gender-neutral language. Feminist linguistics, however, was a challenge.

I was fortunate to find a great deal of hands-on help. Anne Forrest gave me her advice on the course; Nancy Gobatto, the previous instructor, volunteered her course syllabus and additional material to me; my media-savvy teaching assistant Stephen Surlin had taken the course before — a valuable asset! As I imbibed linguistic terminology, I took the inter-disciplinary nature of Women's Studies as license to incorporate children's books, magazine articles, and my own historical knowledge.

I had always acknowledged relevant currents and discussions in my English courses, but now, most excitingly, I could move this material from the periphery to the centre. Even as *Language and Women's Place* has become less focussed on linguistic terminology, what has continued is the sense that as I teach my students, they also teach me: bringing to light material from Women's Studies and other courses, as well as from their lived experiences.

Nags, Housewives, and Sluts: Language and Women's Place

This course makes visible the sexism hidden in the English language. Students begin by examining the relationship between language and thought. Other topics include gender differences in the use of language, the politics of naming, gender and metaphor, and humour.

Who's Who in this Issue

Betty Barrett is a faculty member in both Women's Studies and the School of Social Work.

Marija Byrne is a Master's student in History. Her particular interest is Aboriginal Canadian history.

Lori Buchanan is Associate Dean, Research & Graduate Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. She holds the Canada Research Chair in Psycholinguistics in the Department of Psychology.

Lillian Gallant graduated in 2011 with BSW in Social Work & Women's Studies. She is assisting with the DV program.

Anabella Hatami graduated in 2010 with a BSW in Social Work & Women's Studies.

Dusty Johnstone is a PhD candidate in Social Psychology at the University of Windsor. She is studying how women label and explain their experiences of sexual assault and why they struggle to use or accept the term of rape.

Pat Noonan is Windsor's favourite feminist and newest movie star.

Danielle Price teaches in Women's Studies and the Department of English Language, Literature & Creative Writing.

Learning that Surpasses the Classroom

By Lillian Gallant

Recently, I was one of many Women's Studies majors who participated in focus group discussions about the Women's Studies program. I did not know what to expect. We were pretty much strangers. We did not have classes together nor were we in the same year. Who could have foretold that over the course of a two hour conversation we would share stories that would bring us to tears?

After introductions, the facilitator posed questions to the group. No one in our section was shy, so conversation was natural and everyone in the room spoke up. The discussion went much deeper than the knowledge we had learned. We all began to talk about how the things we had learned had directly changed our lives.

One woman spoke of the awareness of self and the validation she felt in the lessons taught in class. Another explained how her own outlook on life changed, and that this new found knowledge was influencing those around her. Another woman talked about the new respect and relationships she has developed with other women.

It was amazing to hear the things I was thinking and feeling coming from the mouths of others. The facilitator sat in awe. She listened intently to the testimonials of everyone and apologized when she had to bring us back to the task at hand, not wanting to interrupt a conversation that was so full of passion.

As the evening ended we all had one more thought to share. What we have learned has changed us so profoundly that we could never go back to the people we used to be. We are empowered, motivated, and inspired to change our own lives, and the lives of others.

It was at this point that we all welled up with tears, ending the night on a high note. No matter what happens in our lives, that day will be remembered by all of us.

The focus groups sessions were organized and led, and the final report written by Dusty Johnstone.



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geonetics.net/twintour

Twintour ride for Heart and Stroke

These Fifty-Year Old Thighs

By Lori Buchanan

My sister Nancy and I spent 46 days this summer on bikes riding across Canada for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Our goal was to promote cycling as a way to women's heart health.

We met Ann O'hagan our first day. She is truly inspiring: a 75 year-old woman who was out for her daily bike ride. Ann extended her 40 km ride by another 20 kms or so to help us find our way. We weren't blazing down the roads but we were exceeding 25 kms an hour and Ann wasn't slowing us down at all. Ann left us with two important pieces of advice – keep riding and lift weights.

We only met two other (younger) women on bikes during our trip – one in B.C. who was out for a daily ride and another in Ontario out for a three day trip. Mostly, we met men.

At a party in Edmonton we might have heard a reason for that. A young woman who claimed to have a keen interest in cycling said almost proudly, "I'd like to get into cycling more but it would make my thighs too big." Now, I won't say that I don't feel cheated that I gained a few pounds on my trip but I will say with pride that these fifty-year old thighs carried me 6500 km in 46 days.

In popular media women are encouraged to exercise to sculpt their bodies but maybe, instead, we should exercise to sculpt our lives. I choose to sculpt my life like Ann O'hagan's and I exercise for health not for looks. I'm happy to take whatever thigh size/shape that brings me. In the end, there is nothing more attractive than a strong body that can meet daily physical challenges at any age.



Read the Twins Tour blog at:
www.geonetics.net/twintour



How I Spent My Summer Vacation

By Pat Noonan

It's difficult to say "no" to a strong group of wonderful feminists that you admire and have been in community with for many years. They asked me to "star" in a documentary highlighting my colourful career as a rabble-rouser and activist for social justice.

I was convinced that I had to refuse because I had lost my voice a few months back and was still having speech problems. They were surprisingly unsympathetic to my hesitation and not amused by my offer to do a silent film.

Eventually, the guilt took over. What if a documentary could inspire young women to take responsibility for building the kind of world they dreamed was possible? And so this is how I spent my summer vacation.

The first few interviews were easy ... early childhood ... teen years ... until we reached a stumbling block: the convent. How could I have been locked up for twenty years? How could a nun have started Windsor Women's Liberation without getting expelled?

Answers could only be found by a "direct action" visit to the Ursuline Convent in Chatham. Here we spent the day interacting with a community of aware women, leaders in environmental and social justice movements.

The closing "clip of the day" was yours truly reclaiming the convent steps to the very door I entered 60 years ago, with a wave to the world that I thought I was giving up. Not a dry eye in the house!

Back in Windsor, my friends were quite impressed at the beginning of the filming sessions but somehow the novelty wore off. It could have been that I showed up too many times "avec crew" because some of the activists were in overlapping groups. They tired of the "bright lights" and my "great works." The paparazzi syndrome was getting to them but soon the summer ended.

It turned out to be a great vacation! The whole experience reinforced everything I've always believed about the women's community in Windsor and now we have a film to prove it.

Just don't ask for SISTER ACT 2!

RABBLE ROUSER

Starring Pat Noonan (as herself)

Coming to a venue near you some time in 2012

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