

Join In This Year's Distinguished Visitor Events by Anne Forrest

Friends of Women's Studies are pleased, proud, and excited about hosting Lee Lakeman as our Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies for 2006. Lakeman is a long-time feminist activist in the movement to stop violence against women.

Her visit in October will focus our attention on the violence that women face every day of our lives because we are women. Whoever we are — rich or poor, pretty or plain, young or old, well educated or not — we live with the knowledge that sexist violence could enter our lives at any moment.

The kick-off event for this year was our Breakfast Party in June. And it was a party, not withstanding the seriousness of the subject. We were introduced to Lakeman and her radical feminist politics by Charlene Senn, who admires Lakeman's determination to turn feminist theory into feminist practice; reminded of the centrality of violence in women's lives by Gisèle Harrison, who reviewed one week in her life as a counsellor at the Sexual Assault Crisis Centre; and urged to join 250 for \$250 by Carol Libby, who always seems to find the fun in fund-raising.

The breakfast also included a staged reading from Ntozake Shange's choreopoem, *for colored girls who've considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* by Windsor Feminist Theatre. This provoked a multi-faceted discussion about the appropriateness of white women reading the words of women of colour. Read more about this controversy or say what you think on the Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies website: www.uwindsor.ca/wsvvisitor. Enter the discussion board using the username: *wsvvisitor* and the password: *250member*.

While she is in Windsor, Lakeman will participate in Women's Studies classes and community events (most of which are free and open to the public). She will urge us to see our common cause and to act on it. We live in a culture in which violence against women is everywhere. Women confined, beaten, raped, and murdered are a popular story-line. Read any good mystery books lately? Checked out the ads in women's magazine ads for shoes and jeans?

But the reality of sexist violence can also divide, Ms Lakeman argues. She cautions us to beware the discourse of female innocence and sexual purity that labels some of us less deserving of public protection. The Missing Women from Vancouver's Eastside were dismissed by the police and the media until the horrifying discovery of dismembered bodies on Robert Pickton's pig farm. The idea that some women's pain and suffering count less than others' is evidence of the racism that lurks below the surface of Canadian "niceness."

All women are everywoman, Lakeman says. Hear her, meet her when she is in Windsor. You'll be engaged — and moved to action.



Women's Studies

presents a one-woman show
written and performed by

Leslie McCurdy

Things My Fore-Sisters Saw

**Tuesday, 19 September
11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**

**Katzman Lounge, Vanier Hall
University of Windsor
For more information, please call
519-253-3000 ext. 2315**



Sneak Preview

***One Size Fits All:
Women in Body Bags***

presentation by

Carol Margaret Davison

Thursday, 28 September
4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

McPherson Lounge, Alumni Hall
University of Windsor

For more information
please call
519-253-3000 ext. 3727



One Size Fits All: Women in Body Bags by Carol Margaret Davison

"For a woman to be good, she must be dead, or as close to it as possible. Catatonia is the good woman's most winning quality."

When radical feminist Andrea Dworkin published that statement in 1974 in her book *Woman Hating*, she was immediately denounced and vilified. And yet that and her subsequent studies of how Western fairy tales, literature, and pornography promoted the ideal woman as objectified, silent, and humiliated were strikingly astute as cultural assessments.

Indeed, Edgar Allan Poe's claim in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1850) that "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world," articulates the unwritten mantra of many male nineteenth-century writers and artists who took women as their subject/object. Poe's statement provocatively combines the two key components of a paramount Western ideal — women and death. And the ideal of the beautiful, dead woman persists into the twenty-first century, especially in the visual media where women in body bags are not only popular but proliferating.

With an eye to the work of Lee Lakeman — this year's Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies — on women and violence, Carol Margaret Davison will consider the history, nature, and meaning of our culture's obsession with the figure of the dead woman over the course of the past few centuries.

Why Friends of Women's Studies? by Rachel Olivero

My journey has been momentous. Last June, I was delighted to receive an invitation to the Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies Breakfast Party from Ashima James. The first thing I noticed was the distinctive invitation. It depicted a woman on a plate. Intrigued by the concept, I was interested in knowing more. When I learned about artist Judy Chicago and her epic installation, *The Dinner Party*, I knew I had to attend. The invitation said I could bring a guest, so I decided to bring my Mother.

The Breakfast Party did not disappoint! It featured Leslie McCurdy as Viola Desmond from *Things My Fore-Sisters Saw*, and introduced Akua Benjamin as the Distinguish Visitor in Women's Studies for 2005.

Last year's theme was the meaning of feminism in a pluralist society. I was immediately hooked. I had always thought that popular definitions of feminism referred to the needs of women who were white, middle-class, able-bodied, and heterosexual. As a first generation immigrant woman of colour, I did not think this definition included me or my experiences. I was pleasantly surprised to see Women's Studies advocate for a feminism that includes all women's voices, including mine. I was very impressed with what I saw and heard. Not only did I join 250 for \$250, I also became part of Friends of Women's Studies that very day!

I have become one of an incredible group of hard-working, dedicated women. Over the year these women – whose work I had long admired – became friends in both senses of the word. These remarkable women have shown me the meaning of personal empowerment, sisterhood, and the power of collaboration. I have also come to realize just how much *still* needs to be done to eradicate inequity and injustice in our society, and the responsibility we all share.

I was proud to be part of last year's Community Dinner. I attended with several of my female high school students (whose tickets were generously donated by individual members of Friends of Women's Studies). The Distinguished Visitor, Akua Benjamin, was amazing. Her connection with my students was immediate. As young women of colour, they were affirmed by Akua's lifelong commitment to fighting for the rights of marginalized people, especially immigrant women and women of colour. It was very powerful for them to see Akua – someone who looked like them – making a positive difference in the world. She awakened them to many unexplored possibilities.

At the end of the talk, my students eagerly gathered around Akua waiting to meet her and get their programs autographed by her. When we debriefed afterwards, one of the young women said that the lesson she learned from Akua is that even one person can make a difference.

When I reflect on Akua's visit to Windsor and her message that we are all "Sisters in the Struggle" regardless of race, ethnicity, creed, and culture, I am left with a feeling of hope. Hope for ourselves, hope for our sisters and most importantly hope for our daughters and granddaughters. I am not pretending to have all the answers or solved all the problems. Fully embracing equity and diversity is a journey. However, I am proud and honoured to be a part of the Friends of Women's Studies. We can have a better more equitable society, but it is up to all of us, personally and collectively to help build it.

She's a Radical Feminist!? by Kim Willis-More

Although I have not had the opportunity to meet Lee Lakeman in person yet, I admit that I am both intrigued and fearful of her radical feminist politics.

I find much of what she has done to protect the rights of women to be highly admirable. However, I have to wonder how Windsorites will react to a self-identified radical feminist as Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies this October. While I consider myself to be a feminist, I would not be inclined to turn my home into a transition house for assaulted women as Lakeman did in the 1970s. I would be sympathetic, of course. But I know few people who would be willing and able to open their homes in this manner.

Unlike many, Lakeman is not afraid to label herself "radical." In fact, she says she grows more radical every year.

In my experience, saying "I am a feminist" is enough to make people uncomfortable. Yet being a feminist simply means believing in women's full equality: socially, politically, educationally, and economically. Is the discomfort I see because people still don't accept these principles? Think they are irrelevant? Are embarrassed to agree? Even more embarrassed to admit they oppose women's equality? I wonder.

What IS the difference between a *radical* feminist and an *ordinary* feminist like me? Technically, radical means going to the root of something, and certainly gender inequality is the root of women's oppression the world over. The difference, as I see it, is that *radical feminists* always *act on their beliefs*, and – *radically* – *they always act on behalf of the most disadvantaged women first*.

I have to wonder what has inspired Lakeman to continue her work to end violence against women. She has been vilified in the media and faces constant scrutiny and debate about her beliefs and methods. I look forward to hearing about her philosophy, the strategies she uses to promote women's equality, and how she keeps herself going when the journey seems so endless.

Does radical mean inspirational? I hope so. After her visit to Windsor in October, I expect a few more of us to become a bit "radical" ourselves. Nellie McClung gave us good advice when she said, "Never retract, never explain, never apologize. Get the thing done and let them howl." Now, that sounds radical.

Save the Date!

Distinguished Visitor
Community Dinner

Thursday, 19 October
Reception at 5:30 p.m.

Invitations are coming soon!

Coursepacks with readings that will help you prepare for Lee Lakeman's talks are available free of charge for 250 for \$250 members. For non-members, there is a \$15 postage and handling charge.

Please contact the Women's Studies Office at 519-253-3000 ext. 3727 or come to 250-2 Chrysler Hall South for your copy.

This year's 250 for \$250 Garden Party will be Sunday, October 15. Invitations in the mail soon. Don't forget to R.S.V.P.

Friends of Women's Studies 2006

Shirley Linton
Amanda Gellman
Jane Brindley
Ashima James
Carol Libby
Kim Willis-More
Carol Reader
Lynne Watts
Rachel Olivero
Anne Forrest
Gisèle Harrison
Joyce Zuk
Lois Smedick
Micheline Rawlins
Anne Winterbottom
Judith Sinanga
Danielle Reaume
Pat Rogers

Keep up-to-date with
Distinguished Visitor week.
Visit
www.uwindsor.ca/wsvisitor

The website will be updated
weekly between now
and October.