

Book Review

Laundry Lines: A Memoir in Stories and Poems

Ann Elizabeth Carson; Toronto: Inanna Publications, 2015.

*Monday morning is coffee smells and pulley squeaks
as my mother hangs clothes on two steel lines,
strung garden-length;
wooden pegs in a pouch on the line, the next peg
in her mouth - she could even talk around it.*

Profiled earlier in the Writing Aging and Spirit blog, [Ann Elizabeth Carson](#) finds herself at age 86 with much to say in poetry and prose about her life and the world within which she has lived. See [Risks of Remembrance](#) (2010) and [We All Become Stories](#) (2013).

Laundry lines is a poetic exploration of women's work in stories and poems. *Laundry lines* refers concretely to clothing pegged diligently by women and young girls onto outdoor lines in all types of weather. Carson also describes the line stretched across her Manitoulin cottage with ideas written on recipe cards conveniently set out for ongoing rearrangement -- in the days before computer software for writing. [Take note of the cover image.] Behind the scenes runs the theme of quilted shapes set out with messages for slaves escaping to Ontario on the underground railroad or for loyalists dealing with invasion in 1812.

*Women stitching, laughing, news-making, grieving
Together. Quilts track history. Quilts in cloth, wood or metal
Sign war routes, hidden foot-paths, ousted secrets, local beauty.
Proudly sold at church bazaars, high on a barn wall, or strung
Along a country highway. Anyone who looks can learn the stories.*

Carson regales us with anecdotes about two maiden aunts who welcomed her to their weekend/summer place in a country town; coming of age during World War II; summers over the years at her cherished cottage on Manitoulin Island; and, more recently, ice storms in Toronto.

Four sisters, loving, faith-filled deeds and doing, well-socialized Protestant introverts. ... Their bleak, sorrowful sides were almost always as hidden as the cellar floor ..., sometimes schismed in a misjudged step when the light fails, and as illuminated as [the] glittering jars in basement cold rooms, replenished yearly by an interwoven web of independence, beauty, and practicality.

*In fair weather, lake winds buffet jeans and T's on a line
strung from tree to tree, flap child-memories
of a 'good drying day' as the last sock is hung.
Heels turn out, toes face each other on the days
when writing is stuck. ...*

The story *Necessary Housekeeping* swept me away. I was captured by the sweet tale of an immigrant cemetery gardener helping to maintain flowers at a grave, even as I was tugged more and more deeply by the information seeping through about the sad, unexpected loss the author had endured.

The interweaving of stories and poems works well to re-focus attention on nature, emotions, and narrative – all of which are featured in both forms. Marilyn Walsh's striking 'etchings with embroidery' highlight the movement of these threads in Carson's memoir.