Walk Myself Home: An Anthology to End Violence Against Women
Andrea Routley, ed.

Reviewed by Heidi Greco

Because I live in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, I was fortunate enough to attend one of the events supporting this important new anthology. The reading was held at the Carnegie Community Centre, at the corner of Main and Hastings, the heart of the Downtown Eastside – on those same Eastside streets where so many women disappeared, then turned up later in the diggings at a serial killer’s pig farm.

As I understand it, news of the plan for this book started out the way so much of women’s news has traditionally been spread over the years, by word of mouth. Nonetheless, editor Andrea Routley has attracted a range of interesting writers, including a number of BC’s best known. But in amongst those pages of work by Susan Musgrave and Kate Braid and Fiona Tinwei Lam are lesser-known names – those of musicians, tree-planters, an eighty-year-old dog-walker and, happily, a number of men.

The pieces included range from poetry and memoir, to extended pieces of creative non-fiction. In my mind, the saddest point made (and one that is made by a number of writers) is the idea that “fault” or “blame” still remains buried in so many women’s experiences of violence. And yes, there are pieces that elaborate on the kinds of things that men have done to women in the name of some kind of misunderstood power-over them.

But the overall tone of the book is far from one of victimization. Kate Braid’s piece, “Framing Job,” an excerpt from a forthcoming memoir, leads us along the scary path of balancing on half-built rooftops as she grows in strength, learning her trade as a carpenter.

The air is thin up here and of a strange temperature that swings wildly between hot and cold. I smell fresh-cut lumber, sharp as smelling salts and I can see for miles, looking south past the development, across the flats and right on out to where early morning mist still hides the airport. A breeze washes my cheeks. I am a tightrope walker with no net. (55)

Surely, these are words of empowerment!

And there are other victorious pieces, though they might not seem obviously so. Trysh Ashby Rolls’s non-fiction reportage retells detailed proceedings of her successful (and precedent-setting) case against a physician who betrayed the trust of his position by sexually exploiting her. Ruth Carrier’s “Fireball,” an entry of barely a page, packs much of a life into its few words; a “grey short-haired alley cat” (129) emerges as both protector and friend. The work in this volume is undeniably diverse.

There are pieces on the commonality of experience all women share, as witnessed in these lines from Elee Kraljii Gardiner’s poem, “Library”: 
Most are busy
with their trappings as I step
from the shower, decked in droplets,
yet one woman inclines
her head, as if to say
I know how it is,
and this is some peaceful heaven. (98–99)

There are a number of depictions of life in non-white culture, a welcome inclusion in a book that might claim to represent women in British Columbia.

One of the most powerful pieces in the book is Susan Musgrave’s “Heroines,” a poem sequence “drawn from the stories of six women, heroin-addicted prostitutes, from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” (158). Chilling might be one word to describe it.

But even those pieces told with less skill than Musgrave’s are here because they’re bearing witness to truth, to women’s truth.
A powerful kind of spirit seems to accompany this book – or it certainly did on the night of the reading I attended. I believe it is this spirit, especially as embodied in those articles of triumph, that carries the message of hope, the message borne in the book’s sub-title, “to end violence against women.” In keeping with that goal, I can only hope that there will soon come a time when every woman can say with confidence – no matter the time of night or day – not to worry, that I’ll Walk Myself Home. ♣

Heidi Greco lives in South Surrey, B.C., where she’s mostly not afraid to walk herself home.

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