

★ **Writing the Revolution**

Michele Landsberg; \$24.95 paper 978-1-89718-799-9, 336 pp., 6 x 9, Second Story Press, Oct. Reviewed from finished book

While second-wave feminism had been mounting for more than a decade by the mid-1970s, there was scant evidence of it in mainstream Toronto media. For “libber” news, you needed to seek out *Broadside*, Toronto’s feminist newspaper, or out-of-town rags like Vancouver’s *Kinesis* or Edmonton’s *Branching Out*.

This situation changed dramatically in 1978, when the *Toronto Star* became the first Canadian daily to employ a “feminist” columnist. The intent was admirable, but their hiring choice caused some skepticism. Michele Landsberg was an ex-*Globe and Mail* reporter and a *Chatelaine* staffer during the reign of editor Doris Anderson, who raised the consciousness of Canadian women by slipping in articles on domestic abuse and abortion among the magazine’s recipes and beauty tips. What could this comfortably middle-class, married (granted, to a career politician too far left to count among the Toronto establishment) woman tell us about life in the gender trenches?

Plenty, as it turns out. The columns selected for *Writing the Revolution*, from more than 3,000 written between 1978 and 2005, demonstrate just how fearless Landsberg was, particularly in her early years at the *Star*, when sexism was still rampant and the public less than enlightened. Her columns hit on hardcore feminist issues – equal pay, rape, sexual exploitation, child abuse, lesbianism – with the precision of a laser and the force of a hammer. She refused to make feminism palatable, polite, or easy, in the process calling out judges, lawmakers, police, and the church. Hers was a tough and compassionate voice in what amounted to a chauvinistic wilderness.

The collection is organized by theme rather than chronologically, and few of the pieces feel dated, which is a tribute to the author but not exactly good news for women. While readers who followed her in the *Star* may feel a certain nostalgia at rereading these pieces, what’s even more interesting is Landsberg’s running commentary of back stories, details about sources, and other asides, fascinating additions that make this book much more than a mere collection of newspaper columns.

Writing the Revolution demonstrates how Landsberg took feminism to the masses with

intelligence, passion, and wit, and illustrates the enormity of the role she played in changing the lives of Canadian women. –Joy Parks, a writer and reviewer in Ottawa.