

Motherhood or career or both

Poet says women's freedom growing

By Deborah Lehman
(Herald staff writer)

Thanks to the liberation movement, today's woman has the freedom to choose motherhood, a

career — or both, says Toronto poet Nancy-Gay Rotstein.

"One doesn't have to be sacrificed for the other," she says.



POET NANCY-GAY ROTSTEIN
... children are her catalyst

Through the Eyes of a Woman, Nancy-Gay's first book published in December 1975, echoes her belief in woman's versatility, both in content and in format.

The book is divided into two sections — Focusing Outward: Woman and Society, and Focusing Inward: Woman and Family.

"I did that to show that a woman can be actively involved in life and equally involved in her children," she said. "They don't act against each other — they complement each other."

In Nancy-Gay's case, her children complement her work particularly well.

"They're sort of my catalyst," she said.

Some poems — notably For Tracy, Nancy-Gay's personal favorite — are inspired simply by watching her three children in their daily activities.

Others, she said, come when she borrows their viewpoints and perceptions — and their honesty.

Whatever triggers a poem, the result for Nancy-Gay is a compulsion to write, and write immediately.

"I can't remember the urgency — I have to feel it," she said. "I have to do the poem right when it happens."

One of the times it happened was when Nancy-Gay arrived at North Bay and felt, she said, the isolation of the north.

FOR TRACY

she sleeps silently
face white from suspended motion
open lips touching tiny gnawed fist
mouth quivering with dreams;
how I wish rabbit and bunny sentinels
could ever protect you from an
age that rapes childhood
for competition and success,
where dreams waken into nightmare
and change becomes revolution;
sleep, sleep my little one
and when you wake, wake slowly

She scrounged a pencil and wrote From North Bay on the only available piece of paper — a road map of the area.

"We couldn't get anywhere because I'd written all over the map," she laughed.

Nancy-Gay contends poetry can't be written without personal feelings being involved.

"Poetry's an intensity of emotion — you have to feel something strongly," she said. "You can't write poetry without feeling it intensely."

And it shouldn't be written unless it's concise.

"Poetry is economy of language," she said. "You shouldn't be able to take even one word out of the poem and have it mean the same."

For Nancy-Gay, poetry is also an expression of her private self — so private that for five years after she married her husband didn't know she wrote.

Through the Eyes of a Woman was published only after encouragement by her husband and Irving Layton, who calls her poetry intelligent, sensitive, compassionate and warm.

"To go from not even showing your husband to where anyone can pick it up for — what is it, \$3.95? — is quite a shock," Nancy-Gay said.

"I write because I have to, and I write for myself" she said. "To me the greatest joy is the actual creating of the poem — that's why I feel no need to publish."

But publish she did, and the book is now in its second printing — because of last winter's mail strike, the first edition was sold out before a single copy reached the West.

"When women tell me my poems express thoughts they have but don't know how to say, that makes it worthwhile," Nancy-Gay said.