

Novel strikes a chord with busy career moms

By **SUSAN HUGHES**
Business Reporter

The stories of three women in the novel *Shattered Glass* evoke a line from a T.S. Eliot poem in which lives are "measured out in coffee spoons."

Pressures of children, marriage and work force the characters, created by Canadian writer Nancy-Gay Rotstein, to be excruciatingly careful about how they ration their time and energy.

But despite their efforts, the women feel like failures on both fronts. A chance meeting at a pivotal point in their lives allows them to examine a range of issues that affect many women today.

"These are real-life situations. The reaction to my book has been gratifying," Ms. Rotstein said Thursday in Halifax. I have had people ask me 'How did you know that was my story?'"

Her book, published in both Canada and the United States, has already gone to second printing.

An internationally acclaimed poet, Ms. Rotstein has been interviewed extensively in both Canada and the U.S. since *Shattered Glass*, her first novel, was published. She has also been asked to address audiences on the topic of women, jobs and family.

The book focuses on women's lives in transition, pulled in different directions by the guilt-producing demands of family and career.

"We measure our successes by what we achieve outside the home. However, we measure our failures by what happens at home. This sabotages our self-esteem and limits our potential for happiness," Ms. Rotstein said.



Peter Parsons / Herald Photo

Author Nancy-Gay Rotstein writes about the joys and agonies of juggling a family and career in her book *Shattered Glass*.

Her book also details the financial pitfalls of the quest for independence and how it affects children.

One character, Judy, is divorced by her husband and must choose between monthly support payments or a lump-sum settlement.

Using smooth, emotion-based tactics, the husband persuades her to take the single payment.

Right away, she learns she has made a big mistake.

Her ex-spouse has landed a new job with a substantial pay hike, but the support payment is final.

His improved circumstances will not help her family's financial situation, which becomes increas-

ingly desperate.

Marriage breakdown and how it influences the decisions the women make is a key element in the book.

In many cases, it forces a decision about work and ultimately, the way a family functions, Ms. Rotstein said.

"The hardest thing in the world is to balance family and career." And she would know.

At age 39, with three school-aged children, she decided to go to law school, graduating from York University's Osgoode Hall in Toronto.

Ms. Rotstein, who has a masters degree in Canadian history, has also served on the boards of the Canada Council, the National Library and the National Film Development Corp.

She said her experiences having a career and children compelled her to write *Shattered Glass*. "I had to write this book. It was important to make sure that every character, emotion, thought and word was totally realistic and honest."

The resulting painstaking research is evident in the novel, which took her seven years to complete.

"I even went underground ... to a juvenile detention centre to find out what it feels like," she said, to write an episode in which a mother has to leave her office to pick up her teenage son who has been arrested.

Her poetic leanings are reflected in her writing, which is flowing and poignant.

Her advice to women caught up in modern-day tug of war between work and home: Be kinder to yourselves and realistic in your expectations.