

LEAF *let*

The newsletter of West Coast LEAF
VOLUME 20 NUMBER 3, September 2007



Ann-Marie MacDonald Speaks About Equality

West Coast LEAF is thrilled to welcome Ann Marie Macdonald as our guest speaker at the Victoria Person's Day celebration and the Nanaimo Equality Brunch on October 26 and 27.

Ann Marie MacDonald is an author, playwright and actor. She was born in the former West Germany and spent the first few years of her life on a Royal Canadian Air Force NATO base near the town of Baden Baden, Germany.

At seventeen, she attended Ottawa's Carleton University for one year, and was then accepted into the acting program at the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal. After graduating, she moved to Toronto where she began working in feature film, television and theatre, and creating original works.

Her well known works include the play *Goodnight Desdemona Good Morning Juliet*. It has had over a hundred productions internationally and has received the Governor General's Award, the Canadian Authors Association Award and the Chalmers Award. In 1990, West Coast LEAF and Vancouver East Cultural Centre co hosted a benefit performance of *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*.

Ann Marie has acted in theatres across Canada, in television and in many independent films, including *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, and *Where the Spirit Lives*, for which she won Canada's Gemini Award. In summer 2005, MacDonald's new play, "Belle Moral: A Natural History" premiered at The Shaw Festival.



Fall On Your Knees was MacDonald's first novel. It was honoured with the Commonwealth Prize, the Canadian Authors Association Award, and became an international bestseller. In 2002 it became an Oprah Book Club selection.

Ann-Marie's father was an air force officer and the family was posted numerous times, including a four year stint in Centralia, the principal setting for MacDonald's second novel, *The Way the Crow Flies*.

"The main character, Madeleine McCarthy, comes out of MacDonald's own experience moving around Canadian bases all her young life as the daughter of a Canadian airman. The case of Steven Truscott, which had a deep effect on her her dad knew Truscott's dad is an obvious inspiration for a chunk of the storyline" *Now Magazine* Sept 25 Oct 1, 2003

On August 28, *The Globe and Mail* reported that Steven Truscott was acquitted of murdering 12 year old friend Lynne Harper 48 years ago, "ending a legal who done it that captured public interest like no other in modern Canadian history."

Ann Marie MacDonald is a past host of CBC television's biography series, *Life and Times* and is currently the host of *Doc Zone* on CBC TV.

Ann Marie lives in Toronto with her partner, their daughters, and their dog. She will be reading from her novel *The Way the Crow Flies*. 🌿

EVENTS

Nanaimo Equality Brunch with author and actor Ann-Marie MacDonald:

Saturday, October 27, 10:00 a.m.

Ticket prices: 30.00

Nanaimo Golf Club

For tickets or more information please contact our office:

Toll Free 1 866 737 7716

info@westcoastleaf.org

Victoria Person's Day Reception with author and actor Ann-Marie MacDonald

Friday, October 26, 7:00 p.m.

Ticket prices: 50.00

Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe Ballroom

For tickets or more information please contact our office:

Toll Free 1 866 737 7716, info@westcoastleaf.org

Women's Equality and Religious Freedom

By Kelly Roulette, Legal Director

West Coast LEAF is following the path of Richmond's purported *Highway to Heaven* in its third and final stage of the Women's Equality and Religious Freedom project WERF. A stretch of No.5 Road in Richmond gained the nickname due to a number of religious institutions that have congregated there ranging from Muslim Mosques to Buddhist temples.

Religious leaders and female followers are being asked tough questions on how to reconcile religious freedom and women's equality under religious institutions that have been dominated by male hierarchies for centuries.

The research data will be compiled in one final report next year. The goal is to use information collected from all three community consultations two have been conducted in the past to inform any submissions we may make to government or in court on how to balance women's equality with religious freedom should any public or legal debate arise regarding the BC Mormon polygamist community of Bountiful.

In August, West Coast LEAF launched a newly updated website (www.westcoastleaf.org). The new website features clear, easy to navigate sections, a media centre and a feedback form. There is also a place for donors and members to update their contact information. The new website was designed by KlikCreative.

One key theme apparent from the current research is that secular law takes precedence over religious belief and doctrine when any potential physical harm exists toward women or children.

WC LEAF enlisted the help of Mehrak Merhrar, who has offered her academic and spiritual insight and to take on a leadership role in the research. Mehrak has a law degree and is an expert on Shari'a Law and its gendered impact. The project also got a boost of support from Stephanie Mayor, a third year law student from the University of Victoria, who dedicated several hours to providing research and note taking for the final project.

This fall, WC LEAF will begin the second half of its final research which includes holding focus groups with women who are active within their faith communities. The plan is to attain enlightenment about women's equality from women who find religious life as being synonymous with community belonging.

UPDATE ON BOUNTIFUL

By Alison Brewin, Executive Director

In 1995, a group of women, including some former members of the Mormon Fundamentalist community called Bountiful, filed a Human Rights complaint against five government ministries claiming that their lack of action regarding Bountiful has discriminated against women. The Ministry of the Attorney General was struck from the complaint, but the remaining four ministries sent representatives to meet with the complainants this August for discussions about a possible settlement. The complainants expressed satisfaction about the government's response and the commitments that have been made to develop comprehensive service provision plans for the women and children of the community.

At the same time, Special Prosecutor Richard Peck, Q.C. presented his recommendations to Attorney General Wally Oppal on the RCMP investigation into possible criminal of

fences in Bountiful. Expressing concern that the evidence available to the Crown did not seem sufficient to result in a likelihood of conviction, Mr. Peck recommended that the Attorney General frame a reference question on the constitutionality of Criminal Code provisions on polygamy. West Coast LEAF is tracking the discussions about this reference case with great interest. Our work in Women's Equality and Religious Freedom project has made it clear that the polygamy laws must be examined in light of the Charter of Rights before a strong, women centred policy to address the negative impact polygamy has on women's equality will ever be fully addressed by government.

In the meantime, we are encouraged by the movement forward in assessing and developing community based response to the needs of the women and children of Bountiful.

We would like to extend our sympathy to the friends and family of Alisa Noda and gratitude to those who gave donations to West Coast LEAF in her memory. Alisa was a lawyer with her own law firm who supported West Coast LEAF generously as a donor, supporter, advocate and past president and committee member. Donations in her memory have been designated as a special fund and the board of directors is determining how best to direct these funds. *Please see insert for more about Alisa Noda and her lasting contributions.*

COLLABORATING ON FAMILY LAW REFORM

By Susan Boyd, Director of the Centre for Feminist Legal Studies

West Coast LEAF is collaborating with the UBC Centre for Feminist Legal Studies (CFLS) on a Family Law Reform Project, supported by funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia. The goal of the project is to examine the B.C. *Family Relations Act* (FRA) and jurisprudence, which is particularly important given the current law reform process that the B.C. government has initiated and the ongoing challenges that many women experience in relation to family law. West Coast LEAF is also facilitating a dialogue with community advocates, frontline workers and lawyers, to ensure that its law reform strategies are grounded in the realities being faced by women on a day to day basis. Women's access to justice in family law is the overriding theme.



The role of the CFLS in this project is to conduct research on areas of law that are being reformed e.g. custody and access law, as well as to locate research that has been conducted in Canada and other countries on the impact of legislative reform. For instance, Australia has moved increasingly towards a norm of shared parenting over the past decade, and empirical studies are available on some problematic consequences for women and children. Four LL.B. students Magal Huberman, Cristina Cabulea, Peggy Lee and Aditi Master have been doing research during the summer, under the supervision of Zara Suleman Director of the Family Law Project, West Coast LEAF and Susan Boyd Family Law Professor and Director of the Centre for Feminist Legal Studies. Another UBC family law professor, Fiona Kelly, is also involved with the project and has expertise in both child custody and the legal status of lesbian mothers.

Our focus over the summer has been on laws related to parenting after separation, because submissions to the government were due on September 7, 2007. Based on the research that has been conducted, as well as consultations with community groups, West Coast LEAF has prepared a submission that is available at www.westcoastleaf.org.

The next stage of the law reform project is focused on the status of children, this includes legal parentage, spousal and

parental support and co operative approaches to resolving disputes. This stage will also incorporate an examination of law reforms that are necessary to recognize same sex parenting. Submissions are due in November 2007.

The website for the BC government Family Law Relations Act reform project is at: www.ag.gov.bc.ca/legislation/. Consultation papers are available on several topics such as "Parenting Apart" and "Family Violence". Instructions for submissions are also available. There are two ways in which we can make submissions – via a written submission or by filling out the online response form/survey. It is important to have as many responses as possible from individuals and groups who are familiar with the implications of these laws and the proposed changes for women. You may contact West Coast LEAF's Director of the Family Law Project for further information at: familylaw@westcoastleaf.org

Information on West Coast LEAF Family Law Reform Project is available by going to www.westcoastleaf.org just click on *Law Reform* then *Family* from the index on our home page.



Sarah Weddington, counsel in Roe v Wade, with Watson/Spratt coalition member Joyce Arthur of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada. The Watson/Spratt case was heard on September 13 and 14. The case will determine if limits on protesters outside abortion services is a reasonable limitation given the rights of staff and those seeking health services. Nitya Iyer argued on behalf of the Coalition.

“THE OPPORTUNITY to collaborate with, read about and learn from experts in the family law field, particularly in the context of women's daily reality within the current Family Law system and in common law jurisdictions other than Canada, better readies us as future legal professionals to handle our cases and clients with a broader perspective and much needed sensitivity in the legal and social realm”

— Aditi Master, Student Researcher for the Family Law Project

Investing in Women's Equality...

West Coast LEAF is grateful for the support that we receive from our donors and members. Your valued support ensures that we can fulfill our mission to advance women's equality in the law. Thank you for your investment in West Coast LEAF that makes our litigation, law reform and education work possible.

CONGRATULATIONS TO PRIZE DRAW WINNERS

In June and July we asked donors to join the Themis monthly giving club or increase the amount of their donation. Everyone who responded was entered into a prize draw.

Long time supporter and former board member Amy Francis won the Cypress Mountain Cross Country Ski Pass for the 2007-2008 ski season. Megan Ashbury won the lovely golden pin from the All China Women's Association. The pin features the Chinese character for "woman". Brenda Edwards was the winner of an MP3 player. **Thank you to everyone who responded!**

CONTACT INFORMATION

We're trying to ensure that we have current, up to date information for all of our donors and members. If you have new contact information, please take a minute to go to our new website and update your information online www.westcoastleaf.org, and click on *Contact Us*. **Thank you for your help!**

SPECIAL THANKS



Special thanks to the Law Foundation of BC for their generous ongoing core funding and support of our Family Law Project and First Nations No Means No educational program.

OTHER SUPPORTERS



Thank you to the Ethical Bean Coffee Company for their support in generously providing our office with coffee. Please visit www.ethicalbean.com.



We would like to acknowledge BC Gaming for funding our education programs.



We'd like to thank the Notary Foundation for supporting the Transforming Our Future training workshop earlier this year.



We are grateful to Human Resources and Social Development Canada and the Vancouver Bar Association, who supported our employment of a summer law intern.



Status of Women Canada / Condition féminine Canada

We appreciate the support of Status of Women Canada, who provided multi-year funding for our ongoing Family Law Project.

WEST COAST LEAF

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LEAFlet is the newsletter of the BC Branch of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund.

Editing & Writing:
West Coast LEAF staff



West Coast LEAF is a provincial organization committed to promoting women's equality rights before Canadian lawmakers and ensuring that the promise of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms becomes a reality for the women of British Columbia.

Thank You!

THEMIS CLUB

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Join the Themis Monthly Giving Club!

Monthly Giving is the best way to support West Coast LEAF. It provides sustainable revenue, reduces administrative costs, and helps us to plan for the future. Please contact Fiona York at 604.684.8772 ext. 113 for more details.