

Rocksalt

BC Poetry Anthology Kicks Off with Poetry Reading

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Last weekend on Friday, November 7th something big was going on at the Vancouver Public Library. A couple of conference rooms in the lower level of the building were turned into something special: a meeting place for the who's who of British Columbia's finest poets. The occasion was to honour the release of *Rocksalt* by having 21 of the poets whose work was collected in the anthology read their poems.

Rocksalt is a new comprehensive anthology of BC poets that hasn't been seen for more than thirty years, and probably won't be seen again for a similar period of time. The project was undertaken by the energetic Mona Fertig and Harold Rhenisch. Harold wasn't present for the readings, but Fertig was an excellent host who introduced the book and each poet with zeal. All the poets were quick to give her well-earned thanks for her hard work.

The book itself is gorgeous both in aesthetics and content and shows that Mother Tongue Publishing, formed in 1994, can really get things done when it comes to putting together a first rate

poetry collection. Both the front and back covers are adorned with a wonderful image of artists in action that sums up the book's content well. The poems are printed on paper that is pleasing to the eyes and that stands up to the words on each page. There are 272 pages containing new and unpublished work of 108 poets from across the province. Each poem is preceded by a description of the author by the editors and a foreword by the author written especially for this anthology.

The event that took place on Friday was one of eight that are scheduled to be held across the province. The proceedings were casual, with all of the poets sitting amongst those that were there to get a sneak peek at the book's new poems and get a chance to see some of the world's best up close and personal. The reading started with Vancouver's poet laureate George McWhirter who read his poem "The rector's warden at Holy Trinity Anglican Church at 12th & Hemlock is named Nova Leaf." The night built on that momentum with great poems by Peter Trower, Maxine Gadd, Bobbie Ogletree, Daphne Marlatt and Peter Morin to name a few of diverse and exceptional BC talent that was show-

cased.

Many of the poets started their reading with a brief introduction of their poem. Susan McCaslin told the story of how her poem, "Demeter Ascends Mount Norman On Pender Island, British Columbia," came to be written; battling writer's block, she hiked up the island mountain, only to be overwhelmed by a flow of ideas. Finding herself lacking a pen or paper she used a tube of lipstick to make notes all over her body.

UFV was proudly represented by two professors who both have pieces in the anthology. Kuldip Gill and Trevor Carolan, both from UFV's English department read their poems to a receptive audience. Trevor Carolan expressed his gratitude at being included in the anthology, having just missed being in the last one. "This is a generational thing. This collection will serve as a snapshot of what the scene looked like now, so people can look back and know what we were all about."

This generation of poets was diverse if nothing else. Besides including poets from all over BC it also was noteworthy for including people from all walks of life in our province,

whether they were man or woman, Sikh, native or of European descent. Another distinction was the inclusion of both young and old poets. Rob Taylor, a younger poet was excited to be included with such big names and his poem "Grey Diamond Wallpaper" really blew the crowd away with its emotional content.

On the other hand, some of the senior members of the crowd were included too, like Judith Copperthorne and Peter Trower, a man true to the spirit of poetry and wise in his years. Trower perhaps had the best line of the night as a group of poets fussed over where to drink at the end of the night. "Let's just find a place where I can get a glass of

beer!" he exclaimed, perhaps a little frustrated. In the end it seemed that although there were poets from all walks of life present at the reading, it was the desire to boil things down to what is essential that unified them all.

Kuldip Gill

