

Helen Jefferson Lenskyj. *A Lot to Learn: Girls, Women, and Education in the 20th Century*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2005. Pp. 181.

A Lot to Learn tackles a broad swath of historical approaches, ideological perspectives, and contemporary challenges facing educators. The narrative is a combination of biography (Lenskyj uses interviews, artifacts, and memories of her mother's education to tell a story of women in early twentieth-century Australia), autobiography (Lenskyj uses her own "privileged" intellectual formation in a girls' prep school in Sydney to highlight social and class distinctions in the 1950s), and case study (parental involvement in Toronto public schools in the 1970s). In addition, Lenskyj interprets all of these varied events through the lens of feminist theory and practice. This structure allows for coherent interpretation of both "retrospective adult memories and interpretations" and "current memory and understanding of events" (p. 5). While the dangers and pitfalls of overextending arguments are present in this type of undertaking, Lenskyj sidesteps them by anchoring her arguments and scripting her narrative with clear focus and clarity.

A Lot to Learn is divided into two parts – one set in Sydney, Australia, and the other in Toronto, Canada – which allows the author to make comparisons, to illustrate clear fissures in cultural understanding, and to record deeply personal life changes. The Sydney-based portion of the narrative begins with an insightful and revealing analysis of Margaret Ever, the author's mother, who advocated independence for women while accepting traditional female roles as mother and housewife. The remaining portions in the first part of the text are autobiographical – reminiscences and impressions of the author's education at Kambala School for Girls. Lenskyj is clearly of two minds regarding her education at this relatively upper-class preparatory school for women. On the one hand, she gleaned competitiveness, social responsibility, intellectual integrity, same-gender relations, and the importance of duty from her encounters both in and out of the classroom. On the other hand, she faced the rigid social and class structures that permeated Australian society in the 1950s and understood the pain and pressures of being an "outsider" in this milieu. Nonetheless, Kambala provided the foundation for her feminist ideas and career aspirations.

The second part of the book deals with Lenskyj's life in Toronto, where she is a "card-carrying" feminist and a proud lesbian who is assisting parents who want a greater voice in the education of their children. Through the lives of these parents, who are largely low-income women, she finds a cause and a means of expressing her notions of empowerment and personal obligation. Her involvement in Toronto's east-end neighbourhood of Riverdale and Frankland Public School frequently placed her in opposition to central administration, teachers' unions, and influential politicians. These encounters reshaped her ideas on feminism, revamped her notions of power structures, and illustrated the lack of tolerance that continued to manifest itself, especially in the arena of sexual orientation. In many ways the programs instituted at Frankland Public School were successful and replicated in other places; however, school leaders continued to resist some very important initiatives to change structures and attitudes. While the "closet" for gay educators in Toronto was still tightly shut in the 1970s, over the next two decades attitudinal and curricular changes allowed teachers and university professors to proudly announce their sexual orientation. On one level, Helen Lenskyj spearheaded this change and was faithful to the sense of obligation that was instilled in her during her school days at Kambala.

A Lot to Learn is clearly written, logically organized, and thoroughly documented. This text is a model for scholars pursuing cross-generational gender studies and provides a structure for those seeking to explain and analyze the education of women. Moreover, the latter portions of the book provide important ideas for community organizers and those interested in empowering the working class. The book covers sixty years and two distinct geographical cultures, which explains a number of underdeveloped ideas and several unresolved episodes in the text. However, this is only a minor criticism of a very fine and important contribution to feminist theory and educational history.

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