

## **Suggested Script for Radio/TV Interviews: Laundry Lines, A Memoir in Stories and Poems**

**By Ann Elizabeth Carson**

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In her new book **Laundry Lines**, Ann Elizabeth Carson....(add synopsis or soundbite from material you already have)

### What is the book about?

Laundry Lines is about the formative events in my life, and in the lives of other women, in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how women's experiences of that time relate to the broader issues of today.

### Why are those stories important?

First of all, it is essential to tell our stories for personal survival. Our stories are our memories. Our memories are our SELVES. When you have no one to listen to your stories you lose pieces of yourself and that is when it is so important to write them down.

At another level, Laundry Lines is about telling our stories to capture our social and cultural history: in this case in print. For example, someone asked the founders of Wired what the magazine was about. They said that Wired is a magazine that writes "back from the future." In contrast, Laundry Lines takes the reader to another century, telling women's stories from 75 years ago.

### Why did you choose Laundry Lines as a title?

In a way it's a provocative title. People have asked me, "Why choose a title that evokes women's mostly unpaid work?" and that conjures sentimental images of clothes flapping in the breeze and women "happily" "fulfilling" themselves at home? For me, Laundry Lines is a metaphor for the stories we remember, the tales we select from the past and hang out to dry for everyone to see, examine and discuss. In Laundry Lines, I also connect my personal stories to what is happening to women and the world today.

### Can you tell me about some of those experiences?

We hear a lot about the "Simplify" Movement. Home canning with veggies grown in your garden, eating seasonally, saving, conserving. Limiting the way you travel.

Entertaining at home. That movement traces to the Great Depression of the 1930's. That is how we lived then. To this day I have a drawer full of elastics!

We lived in North Bay, the end of the line for men, and some women, looking for work. We had very little, but my mother kept a never-ending soup pot on the back of the wood stove. My father was lucky to have a job, but losing his life savings ruined his confidence and living with scarcity threaded through our daily lives from then on. These themes are still with us today: saving, conserving, scarcity, home-centred, limits.

And I talk about my experiences as a young girl and teenager in WW11. The children's story so many people remember is that of Anne Frank. Children's stories of the war in Canada were in no WAY as harsh as hers. But the war experience was formative, and impacted who we are now individually, and as a country. There was rationing of food and gas. Like us, many gave up their car. We never bought another one.

Metals were melted down, even hangers. The war intensified the hardships of the Depression years – as Robertson Davies said, it's "Bred in the bone," it never leaves you.

LOSS. Almost every family lost someone: fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. In my family, my aunt and uncle were in the armed forces and returned home, but several friends did not. My uncles' fiancé was killed and he never married. There was a pervading sense of loss and fear layered in with scarcity, frugality and carefulness.

We were inundated with propaganda about the glory of "serving over there" but as a child and young teenager a QUESTION ran through my life then –and still does: "What was happening to the children and their mothers?" Children and women still bear the brunt of war, of violence, of economic deprivation and now of climate change.

#### What about the women in your life?

The "new wave" of feminism in the 60's and 70's didn't suddenly materialize. There were many early feminist pioneers and I was privileged to grow up knowing two of them, Charlotte Whitten and Dr Marion Hilliard. Whitten was the first woman mayor of a major Canadian city, Ottawa, serving two terms in the 1950's and 60's. She helped to found the foster care system that shifted parentless children out of institutions and into families. Dr Hilliard was an influential force for change at Women's College Hospital in Toronto. She wrote groundbreaking articles about women's health in *Chatelaine* and other magazines, and published a book, *A Woman Dr. Looks at Love and Life*.

***Memories of Cheltenham: See Weave and Mend in the book***

When we were little my sister Jane and I visited my aunts in Cheltenham, a village north of Brampton. We sat on the stairs and peered around the banister to listen to them talk with friends like Whitten and Hilliard. They argued about national and international affairs, joked and had such a great time. Always a home-made cake and tea before bed. Later, when we were older we sat with them at dinner and were encouraged to take part in the discussion – young women could have opinions too! As a young girl growing up in the 30's and 40's, I was intellectually and emotionally shaped by strong, intelligent, single, professionally successful women, and these influences stayed with me forever.

Why are some of your “stories” in poetry?

Poetry is a way of unsettling the conventional. Learning the craft of poetics, I found a condensed, spare way to give thoughts and feelings an edge or “punch” that you don't find in most prose. Some of these poems are political and emotionally “loaded” in a way that can come across as a bit of a rant if they are expressed in prose.

And I was brought up in a strict Protestant family where you never spoke of feelings, so I wrote poetry to express my emotions. I had an undiagnosed vision problem for years and couldn't do sports and so a lot of my poetry expressed movement as well. It still does.

Poetry expresses also my love of nature. We were an urban family but my sister and I spent many summer week-ends at Cheltenham, and summer vacations in Muskoka or Haliburton. And for the last 20 years, I have spent the entire summer on Manatoulin Island. Nature sustains me, is a source of nurturing and spirituality.

The power and beauty of nature is what my lyric poetry is about. The political poems tend to be about what we humans are doing to destroy that beauty. I believe that attempting to pit our puny power against nature will eventually destroy the planet, and us along with many other species, if we don't do something pretty drastic soon.

And then of course you need to laugh to keep your spirits up—poetry is good for that too!