

2019 AGM PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

By Doloris Duval

April 30, 2019

In my report to you this afternoon I would like to focus on some of the highlights and the challenges that this year has held for our club.

In looking back, I can say with confidence that it has been a good year for the Calgary Women's Literary Club made so, in a large part, by the energy and teamwork of these people. Would you please stand to be acknowledged: Margaret, Cecilia, Helle, Robin, Moorea and Shawna. Sandra, Janet and Elaine, also invaluable members of this executive, cannot be with us because they are winging their way to Europe, as I speak. We wish them safe travel and a wonderful holiday.

Over the year, this executive has gotten a lot done, and it's been exciting. We shared in the sense of responsibility *and* honor that came with being entrusted with choosing a program topic for the upcoming year. And then there was the *miraculous* little *Getting To Know You Booklet*. This was a pretty spontaneous project... that was compiled with surprising efficiency... and assembled around my small dining room table. Providing a brief personalized profile of each of our members, this small booklet made for interesting bedtime reading during our winter break. And of course, the executive shared in the planning and preparation that went into creating today's luncheon and general meeting. An energetic group who melded very well, we really enjoyed the opportunity of getting to know each other a little bit better over the year. My heartfelt thank you to each of you. You helped to make my first year as president so much easier.

Firstly, I would like to speak to you about just a few of this year's highlights. Our membership numbers have remained stable over this year. We welcomed Helen Tubrett just this spring and we are just delighted to have you with us. You are already such an active and involved member of our group.

Being in this dining room today also reminds us that at this very time last year that we lost a dear friend and longtime member, Sally Gallinari. Active within the club, Sally has been instrumental in securing this beautiful venue over the past few years. She remains someone dear to our hearts.

Neelima, it's so good to see you here this afternoon. Even with your move to Toronto last year, I'm delighted that you continue to join us for club meetings whenever you can.

Moving on to our finances... One of the happy consequences of a comfortable membership number, is that our bank account, as our Treasurer Helle has just reported, is also at a comfortable number. Even though we are a “not-for-profit” group, having a bit of a bank balance feels very reassuring.

A few years ago, Ritta suggested that we start serving coffee before our meetings. After some debate we decided to proceed. This has now grown to become a weekly tradition that provides everyone with the opportunity to develop growing friendships. Moorea has made sure that each week the table looks inviting and that we have dainties to enjoy. Thank you to each of you for contributing to the small feast that we enjoy each week. Cecilia, the background music you introduced last year really does enhance the atmosphere and adds that little extra something.

We returned to enjoy a second Winter Party at Amica this past November. Anthony, our gracious host, ensured that the atmosphere was cosy and that lunch was delicious. I think that perhaps we’ve created yet another new club tradition.

This year’s program theme, “*Humor, Satire and Irony in Literature*”, just seemed to create a year filled with such energy and fun, and quite a bit of variety. In addition, we were busy!

We toured the spectacular new library. I’m sure that Margaret, you felt a real sense of satisfaction actually seeing the club’s window dedication, crafted so elegantly by Lillian and made possible by all of your hard work. We are all very grateful to former longtime member Isobelle Temple for the very generous bequest that made this project possible.

And weren’t we inspired by this year’s speakers! Marcello Di Cintio, proved to be such an engaging and interesting personality. Liz Howard was such a bright and accomplished young lady! And of course, today’s speaker Clem Martini, always exploring new and innovative avenues to his readers. Each was wonderful...and we got to have them all to ourselves for a whole hour.

Now I would like to share with you some of the past year’s challenges.

The first is the ongoing challenge of maintaining membership numbers. Having been on the executive for the past 9 years, I do remember a period when our membership numbers were very low. I am relieved to say that we are no longer there. By posting notices in book shops like *Shelf Life*, making contact with groups like the *Writers’ Guild*, and fielding inquiries made through the vibrant website presence that we now enjoy thanks to Janet’s dedicated efforts, the Executive is continuously looking for ways to expand our public presence. I know that each of you takes every opportunity to introduce new people to our club by inviting guests or by speaking about the club with friends.

I would also like to speak to you this afternoon about staying current.

Deciding *if, where and how* to make change is one of life's greatest challenges. Those of you involved in downsizing know what I mean. It requires wise reflection and caution. But, not too much caution, because then you are stuck... with a basement of treasured stuff that really just doesn't work anymore!

I'm happy to report to you today that in addition to the very positive energy that each of this year's executive members brought to our meetings they also showed great sensitivity and consideration around implementing change.

When introducing... technology for example. I think that this all really began with Ruth Hilland and her vision of a club website. That was four Presidents ago. In this ever-growing, new digital age, of course issues have come up. Issues around plagiarism, digital literacy and what exactly constitutes "*text*" in today's world. I struggle with the relevance of *chap books* and *graphic novels* but you know, even Margaret Atwood has published at least one. The executive devoted considerable time exploring these issues and the result was the *One Page Summary* article that was provided to each of next year's presenters.

Of course with technology, like everything new, there have been frustrations and set-backs. As we move toward becoming "paperless" we've incorporated the use of epost invitations, as for this luncheon today. We've also begun distributing club materials online, sending our Agendas and even today's *AGM Minutes*. *Our tech* skills are growing and we are getting better at it all the time.

Finally, I'd like to speak to you about program themes.

Experimentation around this began with the *Our Favorite Author* theme. Initially we were unsure as to whether that topic would inspire the same rigor as some of our previous topics like *Nobel Prize Winners*.

Rigor is part of our identity and it is what we have come to expect within the club. After all, we are not interested in becoming a book club that meets for wine and perhaps a chat about the current best seller. Clubs such as those do have a place, but that approach is just not for this group.

Well it seems that at the end of the first year we found that our afternoon meetings had been filled with fascinating insights into the work, the motivation, and the personality of the author and sometimes the presenters too!

In fact, this topic created so much enthusiasm and excitement that we decided to carry it forward for a second year because everyone wanted the opportunity to share their favorite author.

And so *Humor, Irony and Satire in Literature* was decided upon for the following year and what a lovely surprise. I think that it really was “the best ever”. Here we examined work by such a variety of authors. Authors like Robertson Davies. Who had ever really thought of him as a humorist, but Sandy showed us another side to Davies. And Aristophanes? Well, Anne certainly helped demonstrate to all of us just how relevant the work of this “*author from antiquity*” continues to be in today’s world. In fact, there actually were times this year when I thought that the staff might come downstairs and “shush” us.

And in the middle of all of this... there were also many of those magical moments when the author reaches out and touches you, the reader. Garrison Keillor. Denise, he and you brought forward the much deeper and poignant truths that are often masked by humor.

And then, like every year before it, this year has left us with new insights. Perhaps intrigued, now, by an author that we’d overlooked or one that we had forgotten about. Once again, we have a *summer must read list or must re-read list* that is a mile long!!

So, at this point I feel that The Calgary Women’s Literary Club is successfully finding its way toward a place of balance between tradition and progress.

And it struck me that our *Annie*, although a symbol of traditional values now, was in her time a bit of a rebel who certainly broke the rules of convention and accomplished the unthinkable. She changed the world here in Calgary. She built a library. And don’t you think that she would be astounded to find that her group, this group, still meets in her library, for the same reason: “*to pursue the study of literature*”?

So, let’s each of us continue to do our part to ensure that this club continues on for the next 100 years.

Respectfully submitted, DOLORIS DUVAL