

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Three books: risqué, razor sharp and a romp

Local authors read their latest works at the Arts Centre

**JAN DEGRASS**  
Arts & Entertainment Writer

Three authors, Kim Clark, Maureen Foss and Betty Keller — all published by the Coast's Caitlin Press — entertained a crowd at the Sunshine Coast Arts Centre on Oct. 21 with excerpts, risqué and droll, from their new releases.

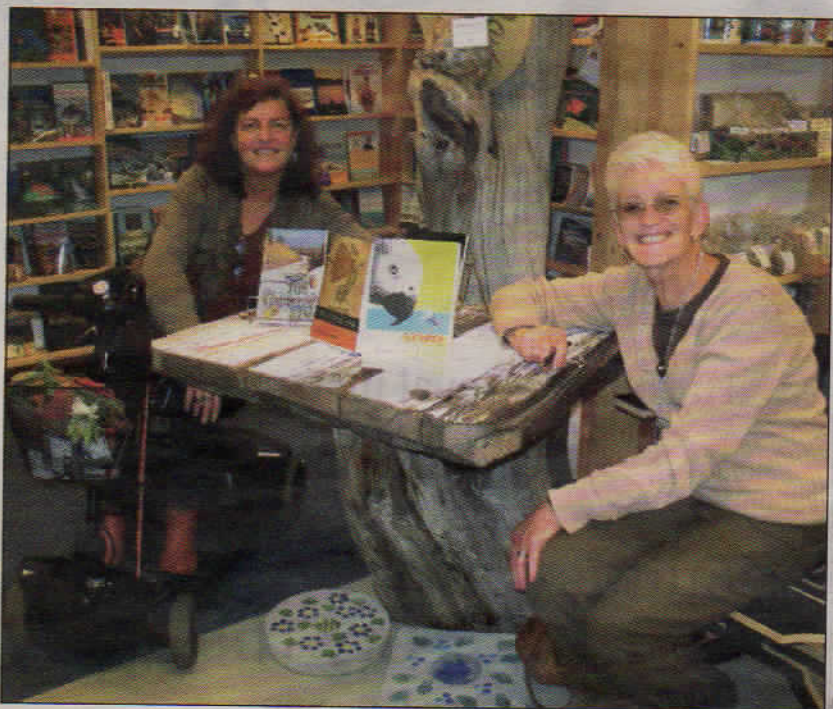
The audience heard from *Attemptations*, short, long and longer stories, a debut collection by Clark, formerly a resident of the Sunshine Coast. The stories are smart and sexy. They bristle with unusual touches and hooks, for example, the opening story, *Dick and Jane and the Barbecue*. The staccato back-and-forth of the main characters is interspersed with factory directions for regulating a propane tank, part of an unwanted gift, a barbecue that Dick gives Jane.

Probably the most resonant piece in the book is a long story, *Six Degrees of Altered Sensation*, in which a woman with multiple sclerosis (MS) learns the results of a sexual study in which she took part.

Foss lived on the Coast for many years, serving as a director of the Festival of the Written Arts and writing her two previous books, *The Cadillac Kind* and *The Rat Trap Murders*. She now lives in the Cariboo where she's a chicken farmer, a master gardener and an insightful writer.

In her latest novel, *Scribes*, four women come together, each with their own quirky or embittered personality, to form a writing group, and soon they find that they have problems in common — the men in their lives. Unusual friendships develop. The reader is caught up in the poignancy of Sari's story whose husband has run away, kidnapping the baby, and the concern of Jemima for her husband Joe who had a stroke following a taste of her lima bean casserole. Mariah is convinced that the clichéd characters in her romance novel are brilliant, despite the group's critique. And, driving the story is the alcoholic Bunny who is emotionally abused by her absent husband, his mother and the family maid.

Characters are Foss's strength; the



JAN DEGRASS PHOTO

Authors Kim Clark and Maureen Foss launched their new books in Sechelt.

quality of her writing is impeccable. But there's a razor sharp edge to the book. Read at your own risk.

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Keller, a prolific Sechelt author best known locally for her *Bright Seas*, *Pioneer Spirits* (with Rosella Leslie), a history of the Sunshine Coast, also launched a re-issue of her historical fiction, *Better the Devil You Know*.

The story is a farcical romp based on true life in 1907 Vancouver when ladies of the night walked in the red light district of Dupont Street, prospectors frequented bars and preachers tried to convert drunkards.

Keller's character, the evangelical Rev. Dodds, is based on a fire and brimstone preacher that Keller remembers from her youth, and he tangles early in the book with the magnificent Magnolia, an irate madam and a scrawny prostitute named Princess.

The book was originally published in 2001, and though the current edition lacks the archival photos of the first issue, it retains all the narrative that moves at a breathless pace.

The evening's master of ceremonies, Leslie, thanked Vici Johnstone of Caitlin for "daring to enter the tough fiction market."

All books are available at local bookstores.