

nelliegrams

established her as a major new writer. She wrote a best-selling historical novel, *The Volcano Lover*, and in 2000 won the National Book Award for the historical novel *In America*. But her greatest literary impact was as an essayist. She wrote such influential works as *Illness as Metaphor*, in which she examined how disease had been alternately romanticized and demonized, and *On Photography*, in which she argued that pictures sometimes distance viewers from the subject matter. *Regarding the Pain of Others*, a partial refutation of *On Photography*, was published in 2004.

From 1987 to 1989, Sontag served as president of American chapter of the writers organization PEN. When the Ayatollah Khomeini called for Salman Rushdie's death because of the alleged blasphemy of *The Satanic Verses*, she helped lead protests in the literary community. Sontag campaigned relentlessly for human rights and throughout the 1990s, travelling to the former Yugoslavia. ~

I LAUGHED SO HARD I PEED MY PANTS!



This familiar phrase is the title of a new book by Kelli Berzuk, a physiotherapist

and the director of Incontinence and Pelvic Pain Clinic in Winnipeg. Despite the title, the topic is no laughing matter. This education and exercise resource is a must-read for all women and healthcare providers who deal with incontinence. According to Berzuk, 1.5 million Canadians suffer from urinary tract incontinence. Half of all residents in nursing homes suffer with bladder leakage, and the Mayo Clinic estimates that half of all women will experience urinary incontinence at some point.

Bladder dysfunction is more common for women who have children. It frequently becomes a problem during pregnancy or immediately after deliv-

Pouring Drugs Down the Drain

by Sharon Batt

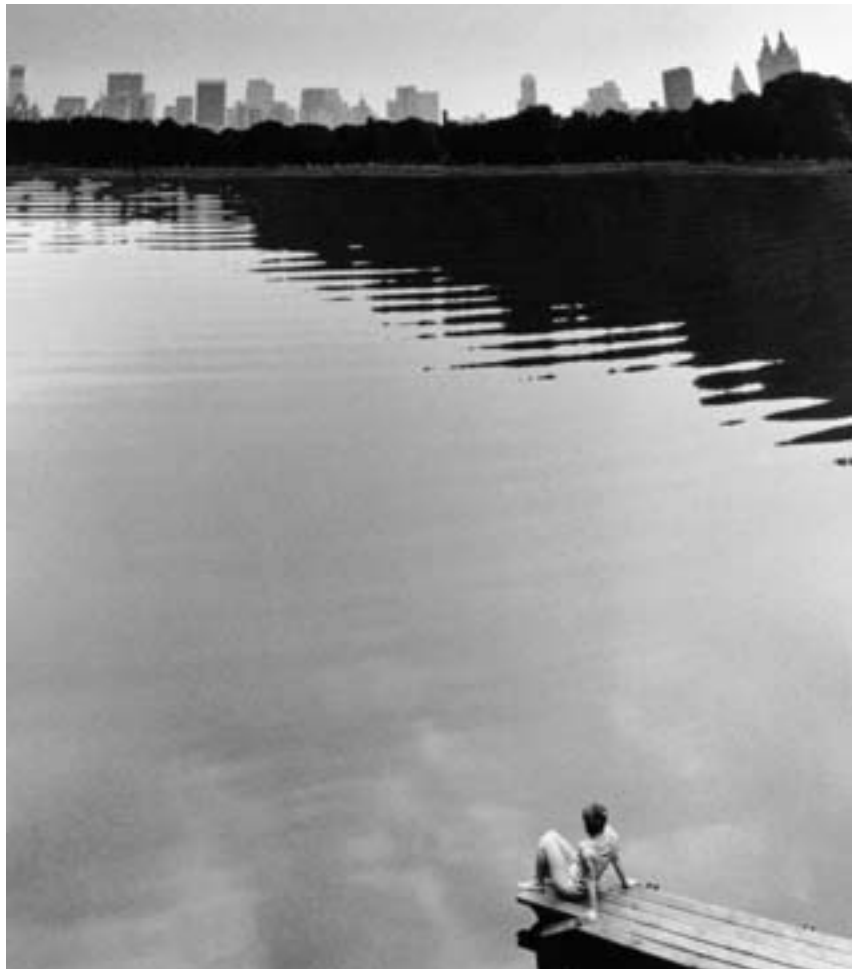
Our rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater contain trace amounts of pharmaceutical drugs that can enter our drinking water and the water we shower in. That list includes hormones in birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, antibiotics, antidepressants, cholesterol drugs and chemotherapy drugs.

The federal government has been working on a plan to address this, called the Environmental Assessment Regulations Project (EARP), but the project has veered off the mark. If the project continues on its present path, the environment that sustains our health will garner less protection than the drug and toiletry industry's bottom line—profits.

Since much of this form of pollution

comes from personal, not industrial, use of chemicals, public awareness is an important first step. Because women use more prescription drugs compared to men, and because drugs have different effects on women than on men, gender differences must be taken into account.

Fifty to 90 percent of the active ingredients of a medication are excreted and enter the sewage system. From there they may pass to a water treatment plant that is not designed to remove them. Unused drugs get flushed down toilets or sinks. Hospitals and nursing homes, meanwhile, dispose of vast quantities of pharmaceuticals that are untouched when residents change or discontinue medications. Farmers give veterinary



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Photo: Getty Images

drugs to animals, including large amounts of antibiotics, which make their way into lakes and rivers.

Research suggests that exposure to multiple chemicals may harm human health, even at low levels. Researchers are discovering that developing embryos are sensitive to chemicals, even minute amounts. The concentrations of these chemicals detected in water are minute, typically between 20 parts per billion (ppb) and less than one part per trillion (ppt) for each substance. But drugs are designed to have an effect in small quantities, and small amounts of different chemicals can add up or interact.

We are exposed to a mix of PPCPs on a daily basis, throughout our lives. The substances and quantities will vary depending on where we live; each community has its own "chemical soup." Many drug compounds dissolve in water, but about 30 percent dissolve only in fat. This enables them to enter cells and move up food chains to become more concentrated. Another concern is that as a society we are using more drugs than ever before, and are thereby setting the stage for increased contamination over time.

Women's health and environmental groups should be leading this debate. New drug products should have to pass tests of toxicity after release into the environment, not just during use. Ottawa should insist on this safety component as it examines drug regulation in Canada and considers who should control the process of safety and testing.

In a series of papers published in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*, scientist Christian Daughton of the US Environmental Protection Agency lays out a plan for the short, medium and long term. Ideas include curtailing ads that promote drug use to consumers (something that is technically illegal in Canada), restricting pharmaceutical giveaways to doctors and exploring non-toxic alternatives to pharmaceutical drugs and alternatives to disposing of unused drugs. He cites an Ontario survey estimating that the provinces wastes over \$40 million in medications each year. *Health researcher Sharon Batt lives in Halifax. An analysis of this article draws from a discussion paper she prepared for Women and Health Protection. It is available online at www.whp-apsf.ca*

ery. Menopause is another time that problems arise.

I Laughed So Hard I Peed My Pants! is a long overdue exercise resource that corrects common misunderstandings and includes diet changes and a proper exercise program. *~*

Available from *Incontinence and Pelvic Pain Clinic, 714 Medical Arts Building, 233 Kennedy Street, Winnipeg, MB R3C 3J5 for \$29.99. Phone (204) 982-9178. www.ilaughedsohard.com*

AMNESTY LAUNCHES ANTI-VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN

In most of today's wars, civilian casualties far outnumber those of armed combatants. Although both unarmed women and men are killed and tortured, women and girls are more likely to be the target of sexual violence, especially rape.

Women face extra, sometimes insurmountable obstacles to seeking justice because of the stigma attached to the survivors of sexual violence and women's disadvantaged position in society. *~*

Check out what Amnesty Internation is doing at <http://web.amnesty.org/actforwomen/conflict-index-eng>.



The Young in One Another's Arms

JANE RULE
Introduction by Katherine V. Forrest

A new edition of Jane Rule's classic novel, about a Vancouver woman and the boardinghouse she runs; a story of politics, place, and female communities. Winner of the Canadian Authors Association Award for Best Novel of 1977.

ISBN 1-55152-181-4; \$21.95



The Young in One Another's Arms is part of Arsenal's new Little Sister's Classics series, resurrecting out-of-print classics of gay and lesbian literature.



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