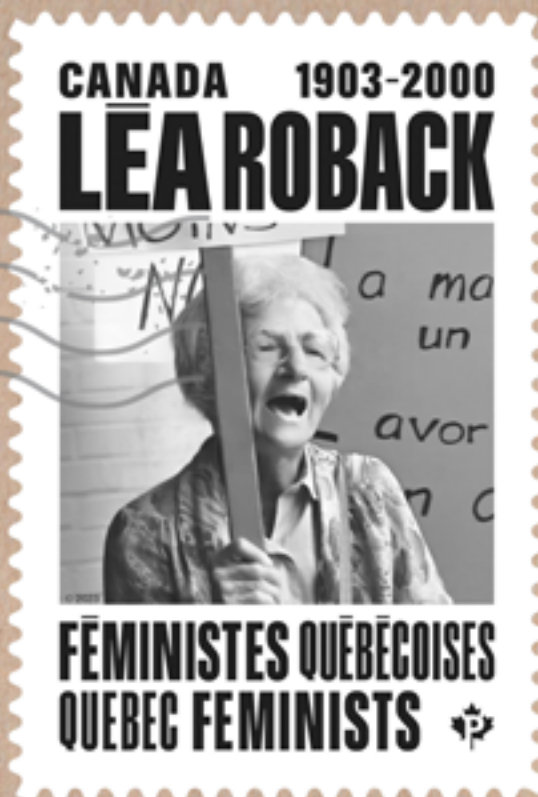


NEWSLETTER

LEA ROBACK FOUNDATION



Number 25, November 2023



LEA ROBACK
FOUNDATION

30TH ANNIVERSARY

A Word from the President



A cause for celebration

There's lots of joy and pride in the air this fall. Indeed, there are numerous reasons for this to be so.

To begin with, there's Canada Post that recently decided to issue commemorative stamps to honour three leading Quebec feminists: Lea Roback, Madeleine Parent and Simonne Monet-Chartrand. Three remarkable women who fought for the respect of human rights, for the advancement of women, and for the improvement of people's working and living conditions. Quebec society still bears the marks of the many struggles that these three women were engaged in. Their beliefs, their determination and their tenacity must remain a source of inspiration to guide us in our contemporary actions and struggles.

Furthermore, this fall marks the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Lea Roback Foundation. Initially conceived to mark Lea's 90th birthday, the Foundation is dedicated to keeping her beliefs and values alive by pursuing Lea's commitment to bettering people's living conditions. That's what we've been trying to do, for 30 years now, by helping economically disadvantaged women who, notwithstanding their day-to-day difficulties and challenges of all stripes, find a way and the time to be socially active in their communities. These women contribute to our society by doing volunteer work, engaging in community action and various kinds of activism. And when these women go back to school, they take the bull by the horns to improve their own financial situation, their living conditions and those of their families. We know full well, as did Lea and as we are all firmly convinced: for women, education is a path towards autonomy, equality and freedom.

What we do receives invaluable support from Quebec's major trade union organizations: the CSN, CSQ, FIIQ and QFL, as well as from other labour, institutional and individual

partners, and not to forget our scores of loyal donors. An operation that is able to have an even greater impact thanks to a number of partnership agreements we've made with the Pierre-L-Baribeau Foundation, the JOC Foundation and the *Baillargeon-Marleau Fund*.

And on top of all the above, we have yet another reason to rejoice. We recently reached another five-year Partnership Agreement with two donors who will be giving an annual amount of \$25,000 so as to grant additional scholarships, which shall bear the name of the *Baillargeon-Marleau Fund*.

Lea was a woman who was independent, determined and committed. But also profoundly human, a humanist for whom it was fundamental to "...acknowledge that our fellow citizens are people just like us."

A pacifist who would remind us today that: "A peace movement must also be a movement for social justice. Peace is essential if we're going to move forward."

A woman, who was convinced that solidarity and struggle can and do change things. As she so aptly put it: "Look up into the sky. For sure, there's lots of grey up there?... But me, I like to focus on the blue."

For 30 years now, solidarity is on the move... That, would make Lea so very proud. There's some blue up there in the heavens to give us hope and to motivate us all to keep going.

Lorraine Pagé
President

“It’s been 30 years”

Next November, it will have been 30 years that a group of friends decided to offer Lea Roback a Foundation bearing her name for her 90th birthday. So, we wanted to call attention to this anniversary by bringing together, for an amicable and festive Happy Hour, current and former members of the Foundation’s Board of Directors, as well as our many partners and donors, scholarship recipients, to quite simply celebrate what we’ve done so far!

In a short heartfelt speech, Monique Simard, recalled with us the circumstances that led up to the Foundation’s creation.

“Vivacious, dynamic, cheerful, always engaged and ready to participate, Lea was turning 90 years old. She had always been a one-off human being. Exceptional. So as her 90th birthday was approaching, on November 3, 1993, a few of us asked ourselves the question: What kind of gift could we give to Lea?



There were some ten of us who threw around a few ideas (...) We rather quickly reached the conclusion that we should give her a gift that would be, in a certain sense, a legacy, something that would go on living, after all, she was going to be 90 years old!

Throughout her life, Lea had fought for and defended the rights of workers and the rights of women. And, just as passionately, she always defended the right to an education, particularly for women, because she believed that education was the key to freedom and both personal and collective emancipation.

So, the project slowly but surely took form: A foundation that would stand the test of time and that would grant scholarships to women who were involved socially in their communities and economically disadvantaged.

Accordingly, on November 3, 1993, Lea was presented with this Foundation at a delightful feast held in a Chinese restaurant in Saint-Henri, an old working class and industrial neighbourhood, where Lea had formerly worked as a union organizer.

She was just thrilled. I remember her huge smile and rollicking laugh that said it all, on that day, that simply lit up the room and delighted all the guests.



Lea passed away seven years later, after a mundane accidental fall. But she was able to witness the very first years of the Foundation, the formulation of its mission, its governance choices and the determination of the parameters for selecting the scholarship recipients. She was so very proud.”

Two scholarship recipients, Maryse Boutin and Naila Gravel, recounted to us how their receiving a scholarship from the Foundation played a key role in changing their lives.



Maryse Boutin shares with us: “At a time where the future is feminine, but where gender discrimination is still omnipresent, and in my role as the head of a single-parent family, a full-time student, a unionized health care professional and a member of a self-managed family housing co-op, that my adolescents and I were able to enjoy a certain hiatus in the midst of hard times, a time of many sacrifices. Taking care of a big pile of unpaid bills, requiring several practice instruments and uniforms, numerous OIIAQ dues ... and savouring an ice cream with my family, sitting on the church floor. That’s how these scholarships helped me cope and deal with various mental issues, a few of my financial commitments and thereby enabled my children to see a mother who could be a bit more flexible, at least for a moment. Thanks to the icon that is Lea Roback, I found hope...”

Maryse Boutin, scholarship recipient.



Naila Gravel, scholarship recipient.



Some scholarship recipients from the Foundation were present, to the great pleasure of all.

The Foundation’s President, Lorraine Pagé, drew people’s attention to the path that’s been travelled over these past 30 years.

“What a journey we’ve had. 30 years ago, the Foundation granted one scholarship, only one. Last year, 22 women were able to enjoy our assistance. Over these 30 years, the Foundation has thus awarded some 380 scholarships, to 346 scholarship recipients, representing a total value of \$690,840. And that doesn’t take into account the 77 education incentive scholarships given to single-parent women, who hadn’t completed high school, for a total of \$38,500. The latter were awarded by our Foundation, since the beginning of our partnership with Maman va à l’école (*Mother goes to school*).”



So yes, indeed, last September 15, we had many many reasons to celebrate and to be proud! Because the memory of Lea is still very much alive. Because the recognition of what she stands for and what she struggled for continues to grow. Because, above all, all these courageous women that we’ve been able to support in their educational plans, who we’ve helped over the years and who’ve been able, accordingly, to take better control of their lives and to improve their lot and that of their families.

We have the momentum necessary to continue.

“The JOC Foundation wishes to congratulate your Foundation on the occasion of its 30th birthday. By way of its mission, your Foundation has played a key role in this page of Quebec’s contemporary history.”

Jean-Paul St-Germain, president

Three Quebec feminists honoured by Canada Post

Last August 28, at the Quebec National Archives building, in Montreal, Canada Post unveiled three commemorative postage stamps honouring Lea Roback, Madeleine Parent and Simonne Monet-Chartrand. Members of their families and many friends were present to celebrate the occasion.

This event brought to fruition a more than 18-month process during which Canada Post had been working closely with people who'd been designated as representatives of the three families. Monique Simard, Alain Chartrand and Lorraine Pagé, on behalf of the Foundation and at the families' request, were thus involved in the above process: the choice of photos, drafting the presentation documents, participation in the videos, the list of people to be invited to the launch: nothing was left to chance.

Donna Mergler, a relative and friend of Lea, as well as a former member of the Foundation's Board of Directors gave a short introduction to the assembled guests. In addition to a number of biographic episodes, she recalled that Lea Roback "was always a person of her time, fully engaged in the struggles of each era. During the rise of fascism in the 1930s, she was active in left-wing antifascist movements; during the Great Depression, she fought alongside the most exploited workers; while during the war, she organized the workers at RCA Victor; and after the war and destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, she joined the Voice of Women dedicated to the fight against the proliferation of nuclear arms and Lea continued to advocate for pacifism during the Cold War and, right up until her passing, she will participate in the movement against apartheid in South Africa. Throughout all these years, she will demonstrate and engage in numerous concrete actions designed to enable women to take charge of their lives and for a women's right to abortion (...) A woman of her time who refused to give up or be discouraged. She had boundless energy, curiosity about others and a burning desire for adventure and freedom for herself and her fellow citizens."



In an article that was published in the magazine *Presence*, the journalist François Gloutnay reported that: "In terms of religion, Lea Roback was very critical of religion which, in her opinion, maintained people's prejudices about the other" says Lorraine Pagé, the President of the Board of Directors of the Lea Roback Foundation. (...). For a long time, the catholic religion, recalls Ms. Pagé, "described Jews as being the people who killed Christ". But the trade unionist, who was not in favour of Zionism, "was also against the myth of the chosen people, because, as she once explained in an interview, if there is a Good Lord, everybody is chosen. Because otherwise, God would be playing favourites".

To read the entire article that also talks about Madeleine Parent and Simonne Monet-Chartrand: <https://presence-info.ca/article/actualite/culture/des-timbres-en-lhonneur-de-trois-feministes-quebecoises/>

Finally! Remarkable women to whom we have a duty of remembrance and recognition were honoured in line with their outstanding contributions to Quebec society, Canadian society, and to the defence and advancement of human rights. The pride and emotion that was deeply felt by all the friends and family who were present was easy to behold. A magnificent moment that we'll cherish forever.



Exceptionnel Partners

The Fondation de la JOC;
the Fondation Pierre-Laurier Baribeau;
the Fonds Baillargeon-Marleau;
the Soeurs de Saint-Joseph de Saint-Hyacinthe
(comité solidarité SJSH).

Great Partners of the Foundation

The Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ);
the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN);
the Fédération interprofessionnelle de la santé du Québec (FIQ);
the Fondation Solstice;
the Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique
de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS);
Mr André Joffe;
Ms Marie Leahey;
Ms Donna Mergler;
Ms Louise Potvin;
Ms Nicole Ranger;
Ms Rose Alper;
Ms Sophie Bissonnette;
and a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

Partners of the Foundation

The Fédération autonome de l'enseignement (FAE);
the fonds Bâtirente;
the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ);
the Fédération nationale des enseignantes et
enseignants du Québec (FNEEQ-CSN);
the Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement
(FSE-CSQ);
the Maison générale des Ursulines de Québec;
the Syndicat de l'enseignement de l'Ouest de Montréal
(SEOM-FAE);
the Syndicat des professionnelles et des professionnels
du milieu de l'éducation de Montréal (CSQ);
Ms Lorraine Pagé;
Ms Katherine Roback;
Ms Mathilde Baisez;
Ms Céline Lamontagne;
Ms Rivka Augenfeld;
Ms Danielle Casara;
Ms Maroussia Kishka;
and a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

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