

HERSTORY Empowers, Poetry  
Natalie Dalton, St. John's  
**Voluntarily Unsex Themselves**

My father's mother kept her garden and her sheep. The wife of a skipper she cooked for his crew of men, and her own seven as well. Long before household work was lessened by machines, her days were filled with the running of her home.

My mother knew mothering long before she felt life flutter deep within her. Her body still bears the lean of one who endlessly held children against a non-existent hip. One of thirteen, there's no way Nan could have done it all. So mom would start her childhood days kneading the bread dough and setting it for its first rise.

The men, they went to work. Their toil more valued for taking place outside the saltbox walls. Their pay a declaration of their worth.

But Armine and Fannie knew the score.

There is no weakness in reddened hands and cracked nipples. No delicacy in the long days that bled into sleepless nights. No fragility in girls who worked their way into womanhood.