

Srebotnjak speaks at CFUW meeting

Host says women aren't portrayed well on TV

By JANET DUVAL
Special

Who gives the best kind of interview on TV talk shows? Not celebrities, says Tina Srebotnjak. The lively host of CBC's Midday show says she'd rather interview writers.

"They say more about things that matter than anyone else," Srebotnjak told the Canadian Federation of University Women—Georgetown. Audiences seem to appreciate authors, who "spend years contemplating a topic, then lyrically deconstruct people's lives—isn't that what fiction is?"

Any author picked for Oprah Winfrey's Book Club will sell an extra half million

books in two weeks, she says.

Srebotnjak's least satisfying kind of interview is with entertainment giants, served up by publicity machines that allow too little time to ask real questions. Hugh Grant, she recalls, was bored and tired when he sat down with her. "I felt humiliated." She wonders if it's time for the media to stop buying into this orchestrated promotion.

Also low on her list are politicians.

"I think they're decent, honorable people, but they can't really tell you the truth. It's the nature of the work they do."

They clamor, however, to appear on shows like This Hour Has 22 Minutes, which humanize them even as they lampoon

them.

While the number of women working in media has improved greatly, the way they're portrayed on many TV shows hasn't, she says. Smart, efficient women like Murphy Brown have given way to "unbelievably skinny, gorgeous ditzes with great careers who whine about their lives and their problems."

But there is lots of great TV out there, particularly on the new specialty channels. As a result, audiences are becoming very fragmented. It's significant that the hottest new show this season doesn't even appear on one of the Big Three American networks.

Srebotnjak isn't too concerned about media concentration and the management of news in Canada. People are becoming far more vigilant now. If Conrad Black's newspapers are right wing, so is the mainstream public. Even at the CBC, you'd be hard pressed to find any left wingers, she says.

After 22 years with the Corporation, she still works on contract year to year, works hard to balance career and family, and chafes that women on camera are expected to look far more made up and glamorous than their male counterparts.

But she loves her work. "I kiss the alarm clock every morning."



Speaker Tina Srebotnjak (right) chats with her former high school French teacher Pat Stuart, a member of CFUW Georgetown and a teacher at Glen Williams Public School.

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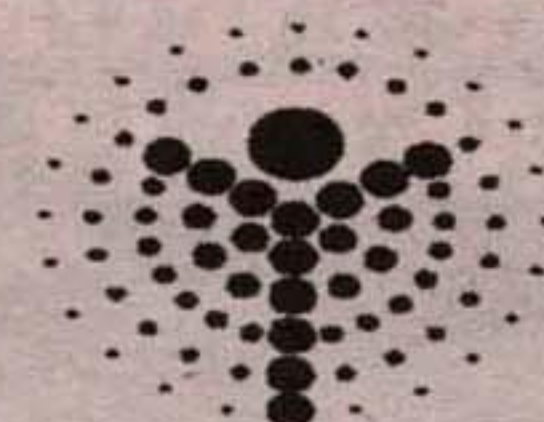
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