



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
March 14, 2008

***“The 2008 Amelia Bloomer Project honors the authors, illustrators, editors, and publishers who give life to books that encourage readers young and old to push the envelope and challenge what it means to be a woman, regardless of ethnicity or social-economic background.”***

-From the Amelia Bloomer Project website ([libr.org/ftf/bloomer.html](http://libr.org/ftf/bloomer.html))

One of the many American Library Association committees is the Amelia Bloomer Project, which is sponsored by the Feminist Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table. Annually since 2002, the committee members have selected books they think “encourage and inspire girls to be smart, brave, and proud.” One of the committee members, Amy Cheney, is a former co-worker from my jail librarian days and so I asked to tell me more about the process of selecting these books.

One of the first points she made was how interesting it was to look at all the books the publishers considered feminist. There are different ideas about what defines a feminist book, she continued, and the committee work included much discussion about whether or not certain books qualify. As a starting place, they used the Bloomer Project book criteria, which gives thoughtful guidelines, based on four basic criteria: significant feminist content;

excellence in writing; appealing format; and age appropriateness for young readers.

The first one of these seems to be the most challenging to determine, since as the guidelines say, “...the definition of feminism is so simple: Feminism is the belief that women should be equal to men.” But how does that translate into selecting a book? And are more specific descriptions needed?

The answer for them was yes and so they have expanded this definition to include the idea that feminist books must move beyond the concept of a strong female protagonist who is fighting only for herself and become more about those who “show women solving problems, gaining personal power, and empowering others.” They stress this point by saying it is not enough for a female character to be strong; the book must also explain that an inequality exists in society and demonstrate action to change these inequalities.

*continued on page 2*

This high standard makes the selection process more difficult, of course, since there are so few books that qualify. This concern is expressed in the preface to the final list: “We challenge publishers to develop thoughtful feminist books that will open the eyes of young readers to the possibility of equality for women.”

After much sometimes heated discussion, a list of thirty-two books was created. Not everyone agreed on every title, but Amy shared with me a list of the 17 books that were unanimously chosen. Included are: *Graffiti Women: Street Art from Five Continents*, by Nicholas Ganz; *Rickshaw Girl*, by Mitali Perkins; *Civil War Doctor: The Story of Mary Walker*, by Carla Joinson; and, *Jyotirmaye Mohapatra* by Adam Woog.

As I started writing this column, I realized I was writing it on March 8, International

Women’s Day. There is a website for this, too, at [internationalwomensday.com](http://internationalwomensday.com).

A timeline is included, starting in 1908 when 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights. As they point out, IWD is now an official holiday in countries around the world. And although there are still many challenges, the tone has changed, from being a reminder of the negatives to being a celebration of the positives.

One way to celebrate this day would be to give one of these Amelia Bloomer books as a gift or check one out of the library and read it or talk about it. Especially for children and teens, it is books like these that will help continue to foster an ongoing awareness of the possibilities for the women of generations to come.