

Living on the edge of the volcano

Crissa Constantine, *Broken Doll*, Broadmoor Books, SterlingHouse Publishing, Pittsburgh, 2007. ISBN 1-56315-389-0

Readers of this newspaper and "Meie Elu" before that may recall the name of Crissa Constantine. The multifaceted Constantine, who lives on Vancouver Island, is of Estonian and Greek heritage, and first came to our attention with *Banished From the Homeland* (CeShore 2000), a work that blended autobiographical elements with a very common experience for those born abroad after WW II — the dislocation and lack of belonging, fighting for culture and community thanks to the communist occupation of our homeland.

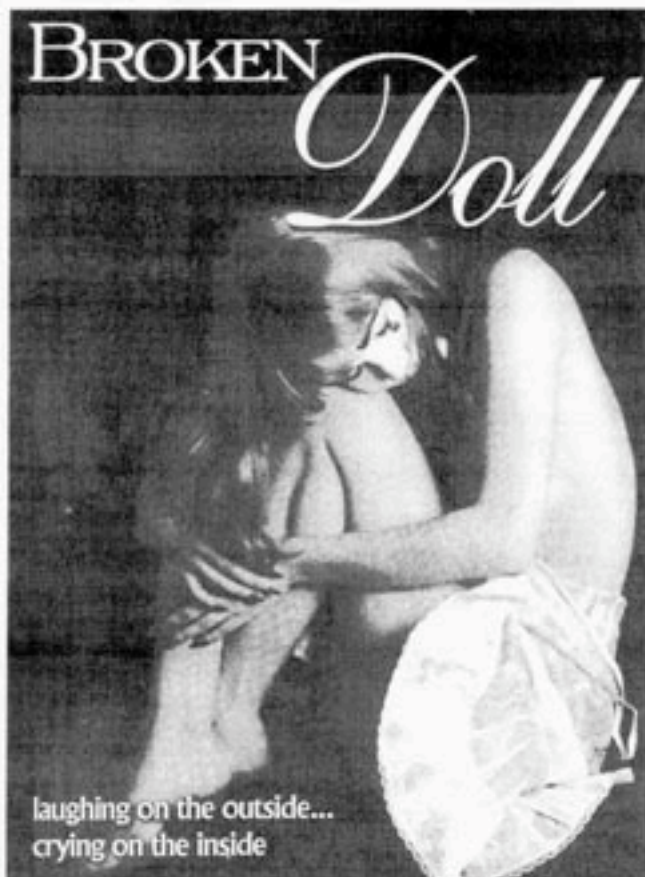
The author's mother was born in Estonia in 1921 and was forced to flee in 1944 to avoid being used as a sex slave by Soviet soldiers. She could not go back home even for a visit until 1991, at the end of the Cold War. Her dramatic story as portrayed in *Banished* is reflective of what happened to millions of Eastern Europeans.

Constantine is also a very accomplished pianist and composer who earned a B.Mus. from UBC in Vancouver and her M.A. in music from CWRU in Cleveland in 1980. Her *Vancouver Island Rhapsody* (CD 1999) is a powerful and moving contemporary classical work for solo piano that plumbs the depths of emotion. This was fol-



Crissa Constantine

Photo: Gordon Lafleur



lowed by an eponymous 2002 CD that took angst and despair as well as positive passion to new levels on 88 keys. (Both CDs are highly recommended.)

She is also still writing, and the September release of *Broken Doll* confirms that the author is continuing to successfully mine the vein of personal passions, focusing on the brevity and caprices of life. (As of the moment there is no Canadian distributor for the book, but special orders from bookstores will work in Canada. American readers can order online at www.sterlinghouse-publisher.com from the "general fiction" category, or phone 888 542-2665.)

Broken Doll is the account of an unusual friendship between two Louisiana teachers, Lisa and Sunny. The first is dominated by her parents who expect so much more from her; the second, as her name suggests, is a *carpe diem* type of woman,

lusty and sensual, flitting from relationship to relationship like a hummingbird in search of nectar. The reader familiar with *Banished* speculates that once again there is a smidgeon of autobiographical revelations in these pages. Lisa's inner turmoil and decision-making odysseys seem somehow familiar. A courageous journey well conveyed.

Laughing on the outside, crying on the inside, as her friend stands on the brink of a volcano about to erupt. Lisa's tale of the joys and tribulations of friendships is movingly presented. Constantine accomplishes the task of avoiding maudlin and mawkish phrases while speaking to — and with — the broken doll within.

A book for the more timid among us, confirming that life demands living *vivace* and *con brio*.

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