

## The Celebrating Women Award

Given in recognition of significant achievements that have influenced the lives of and provided a role model for women and girls.



### Barbara Ehrenreich

In her prolific career as a writer and political activist, Barbara Ehrenreich has never shied away from the troublesome contradictions embedded in our social and economic system. So it's no surprise that in 1998, inspired by the rhetoric of welfare reform, Barbara set out to discover how four million welfare moms pushed off the rolls would support themselves and their children on entry-level wages without the benefit of food stamps, Medicaid, or housing and child care subsidies.

Posing as an unskilled, divorced mother re-entering the workforce, she spent three months working as a waitress, hotel housekeeper, nursing home aide, house cleaner and Wal-Mart stock clerk, in three different regions of the country.

The resulting book, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt & Company, 2001), has been hailed as a classic of underground reportage. Studs Terkel, a longtime chronicler of the American working class, called it “a stiff punch in the

nose to those righteous apostles of welfare reform” and the critic Mike Davis said it “assails the smug rhetoric of prosperity with scalpel-like precision and ferocious wit.”

Barbara earned a B.A. degree at Reed College and a Ph.D. in biology at The Rockefeller University. But the increasing political and social strife over the Vietnam War prompted her to leave the laboratory and turn her energies toward activism and writing. She has authored 11 volumes of social and political criticism, tackling subjects as diverse as the history of women healers, the origins of war, and the secret fears of the American middle class. A novel, *Kipper's Game*, was published in 1993. She is a contributing editor of Harper's, a columnist for The Progressive, and has written for Time magazine since 1990. Her articles, reviews, essays and humor have appeared in The New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post Magazine, Ms., Esquire, The Atlantic Monthly, The Nation and The New Republic, as well as newspapers throughout the world.

She received a Ford Foundation Award in 1982, a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1987–88, and a grant from the MacArthur Foundation in 1995. She shared the National Magazine Award for Excellence in Reporting in 1980 and has received honorary degrees from Reed College, the State University of New York at Old Westbury, the College of Wooster in Ohio, and La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

A longtime feminist and defender of the working poor, Barbara has been called by The New York Times “our premier reporter of the underside of capitalism.” The New York Women's Foundation is privileged to have such an eloquent advocate of social justice and economic self-sufficiency for women as Barbara Ehrenreich as our keynote speaker today.