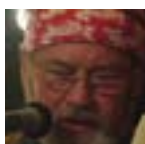


A large, dark silhouette of a tree with a thick trunk and spreading branches dominates the left and center of the frame. The background is a sky filled with soft, white clouds, and a bright, glowing light source, likely the sun, is visible on the right side, partially obscured by the tree's canopy. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

In Silhouette

Profiles of Alberta Writers

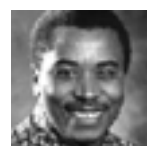
Bob Stallworthy



Contents

(Each writer is linked to his or her entry – just click on the name.)

Acknowledgements	3
Foreword	4
Frequently Asked Questions	6
Timothy Anderson	8
John Ballem	18
Marty Chan	21
Joan Crate	25
Paulette Dubé	29
Dave Duncan	33
Will Ferguson	38
Cheryl Foggo	48
Fil Fraser	52
Cecelia Frey	56
Richard Harrison	59
Greg Hollingshead	67
Faye Reineberg Holt	71
Hazel Hutchins	75



Marie Jakober	79
Myrna Kostash	83
Robert Kroetsch	94
<i>Alice Major</i>	101
Sid Marty	107
Shirlee Smith Matheson.....	115
Suzette Mayr	118
<i>George Melnyk</i>	125
Don Meredith.....	129
<i>Tololwa Mollel</i>	133
Sarah Murphy	137
Michael Penny	144
Ken Rivard	149
<i>Gail Sidonie Sobot</i>	154
About Bob Stallworthy	159
Fred Stenson	161
<i>Richard Stevenson</i>	168
Aritha van Herk	173
Tom Wayman	178
<i>Lyle Weis</i>	189
<i>Sheri-D Wilson</i>	195
<i>Christopher Wiseman</i>	204
Mary Woodbury	210

Acknowledgements

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Some of these profiles have been previously published in the Writers Guild of Alberta's magazine, *WestWord*.

Thank you to my wife, Marilyn, who first suggested that I spend my time learning my craft.

Thank you to Marilynn Stratton, the first Book Display Co-ordinator, who talked me into applying for the job.

Thank you to Mary Walters, the first Executive Director of the Writers Guild of Alberta, who hired me as the Book Display Co-ordinator. Without her acceptance, I would never have met all the writers I now know.

Thank you to all the writers presented in the following pages for your time and patience. This e-book is dedicated to the writers of Alberta.

Foreword

"Are there any (many) writers in Alberta?" Prior to 1985 that would have been a question on my lips too. Not that I was uninterested in reading, I just didn't do a lot of it. I had a hard time learning to read as a youngster and to this day I read very slowly. My difficulty made reading less than an enjoyable pastime. And with the exception of some rather childish poetry written to my girlfriend after Grade 12 and two poems to the woman who became my wife (not the same person), I had made no effort to write anything but social worker reports since graduating from university.

In 1984 it was apparent that I was burning out as a social worker so I left the field, as it turned out, forever. Thanks to my wife's suggestion, and assurance, I began writing every day and I joined the Writers Guild of Alberta. Within the year I found myself in charge of the travelling Book Display for the Guild. The Display consisted of copies of the books written by Alberta writers who were members of the Guild. It travelled to Teachers' Conventions and Book Fairs around Alberta. The major benefits of this volunteer job were twofold: 1) I got to go places in the province I had never been before, 2) I met face-to-face a great many of the writers working in the province. During the years 1985 - 1990, when I travelled with the Display, I think it is safe to say that I knew more writers in Alberta on a first name basis than anybody else. I am happy to say that some of those writers have become fast friends and the others are colleagues that complete a network for me in the writing community.

As my own writing career grew and as my involvement with the Guild also grew, it occurred to me that there were a lot of writers working in the province who didn't know about each other. This was particularly evident within the Guild as it began to increase in membership. I volunteered to write "profiles" of members for the Guild's newsletter/magazine, *West-Word*. These profiles ranged in length from 500 to 1500 words.

As the number of profiles increased, I started to think about what else I might do with them. The rationale for this e-book is that, if individual writers are still not sure who else is working in the province as a writer, the chances are pretty good that non-writers will not know either.

The criterion for inclusion is, at a minimum, having at least one book, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, or children's work, published by a recognized publisher. Almost all people profiled live in Alberta. You will find a few who live outside the province who, nevertheless, built much of their career while living here. They are all hard working writers. Some, I'm sure, you have already met through reading their work. If so, I hope you'll get to know them better through this e-book. I encourage you to continue to read their work. Many, you may not have met before. It is my great pleasure to introduce you to them.

This is a work in progress. New profiles will be added on an ongoing basis as soon as they are available.

Robert (Bob) Stallworthy
Calgary, Alberta
2006

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the best way to look up writers in the text?

Writers are arranged alphabetically in the Contents. Each writer is linked to his or her entry – just click on the writer's name.

Is *In Silhouette* complete and comprehensive?

No. There are hundreds of Alberta writers – certainly, far more than are presently included in *In Silhouette*. The author and publisher are working hard to extend this list; new entries are continuously added as quickly as they are completed. We may never reach the point of being absolutely complete, but we will get as close to that goal as we possibly can.

Is *In Silhouette* up to date?

Alberta writers, obviously, are busy people, constantly writing new books and new material. We're continually updating *In Silhouette* to keep the information current; we recognize, however, that information may sometimes be out of date. The date that each author profile was initially written, and a history of all revisions, are shown at the end of each entry so that you can assess how current the material is.

Can I be confident that the information is accurate?

All information about each writer is obtained through direct interviews with that person. This information is edited for conciseness, logical flow, etc. The edited version is then submitted to the writer for verification; all corrections are incorporated in the final text. All comments or corrections

from third-party readers are carefully considered and incorporated as appropriate. The entire process is carefully designed to ensure the greatest possible accuracy and reliability.

May I use the material in *In Silhouette*?

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What is the procedure if I have a correction or suggestion for improvements?

All suggestions for improving *In Silhouette* are sincerely appreciated.

- If you find any point of fact that seems incorrect or out of date, please let us know – following verification, we will incorporate all corrections as soon as we receive them.
- If there is an important Alberta writer missing from *In Silhouette* who should be included, please let us know.

Contact us at editor@frontenachouse.com.



Timothy Anderson

"I write to relieve the pressure of all those stories and thoughts piling up in my head. If I didn't write, I would be one of those verbal bullies who buttonholes you at parties and makes you listen to every one of their dreary speculations on the nature of the universe." That is the first, but not necessarily the expected, answer when Timothy Anderson is asked, "Why do you write?" After thinking about his response for a few minutes he says, "No, that's not it. I am primarily a moralist. I write to discover, express and promote compassion and understanding. I write because the flaws in my grammar are more easily corrected than the flaws in my character." Perhaps the response that is closest to what he feels comes in the final moments of our conversation, "Writing for me is about the illumination of life in all its complexity and beauty."

Timothy grew up on the West Island of Montreal. "One of the formative events of my early years was Expo 67. My parents would load my brother and me onto a bus and send us off to Expo. When we got there we would split up. I was this kid wandering around Expo. I could only go to the things that were free but being there was what piqued my interest in the world outside and got me first of all addicted to urban environments and secondly, interested in things that were beyond my immediate experience."

Timothy Anderson was certainly not the typical student in school. When he was in grade five he read *The Agony and the Ecstasy*. That same year his school put him up for a scholarship to go to Lower Canada College, which meant several days of rather extensive intelligence testing. The results of

Bibliography

Adult Fiction

Resisting Adonis, Tesseract Books, 2000

Poetry

Neurotic Erotica, Slipstream/River Books, 1996

Drama

Caruso Got There First, Tin Can Society, Edmonton/
Vancouver, 1986

Beauty and the Beast, Alberta Opera Touring, 1987/88,
1988/89

The Sexton of Dingley Dell, Nexus Theatre, Edmonton,
1989, 1990, 1991

Nobody Likes Cassandra, Theatre Source, Montreal,
1992

A Voice From Home, Any Space Theatre, Calgary/
Edmonton, 1993

Strafe, Sandcastle Theatre, Calgary/Edmonton, 1994

The Fourth Tenor, Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival,
1997

Farelinelli, Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival, 1998

Cradle of Earth, Kompany/The Works Visual Art Festival,
Edmonton, 2000

The Favourite, Edmonton Fringe Theatre Festival, 2003

Note Perfect, Holier Than Thou Productions, Edmonton
Fringe, 2003

The Singing Blade, Under the Knife Collective,
Edmonton Fringe, 2005

the tests showed that by the end of grade five, he was reading and writing at a first year university level. In the end, however, he didn't attend Lower Canada College.

Timothy turned 12 at a time when the "Quiet Revolution" in the province of Quebec was becoming anything but quiet. It was a time when life for families with English surnames was becoming uncomfortable. Timothy's parents, like many other English-speaking parents, decided to move the family out of Quebec to Ottawa. This move was not an easy one for Timothy. He was forced to leave his high school with a student population of 2100 and attend Ridgemont High School, a considerably smaller school. "I hated it. I was able to skip a couple of grades and I wasn't visible for much of the rest." When he completed high school sooner than usual, he was too young to go straight into university. He worked as a file clerk in a law firm for a year.

When he was old enough, he applied to Carleton University to the School of Architecture. The surprise was, he got accepted to the Carleton School of Journalism. Up to this point he hadn't even really considered writing as something he was interested in doing. The only writing he had done was some, "really horrible things, particularly bad poetry. I did later round up everything I could find and destroyed it. I did miss one horrible epic poem. I keep it hidden. It keeps me humble."

Journalism school was an unhappy experience. "I didn't think of writing as something I was particularly interested in doing when I was at journalism school. I hated journalism school." It wasn't that he was unprepared to do the work but rather he was painfully shy. Every time he had to go out to get a story he felt sick to his stomach. And, not for the first time, he felt he didn't fit in. Unlike most of the other students in the course, he was taking a combined journalism and political science degree. He was very young and had lived a rather sheltered life, in an extremely religious home, with a specific world view. All his fellow students seemed far more extroverted – they had no trouble going to bars, talking sports or doing a

Music (Produced Libretti)

Gift of the Magi, composer D.G.H. Parsons, Banff Centre, 1985

Garden Variations, composer D.G.H. Parsons, Banff Centre, 1986

Beauty and the Beast, composer T. Anderson, Alberta Opera Touring Onoway/Edmonton, 1987 - 1989

An Expensive Embarrassment, composer D. Gougeon, Canadian Opera Company, 1989

Mercies, composer D.G.H. Parsons, Canadian Opera Company competition, 1989; Edmonton Opera 1999

Sleeping Dragons, composer A. Cole, J.P. Michaels, independent producer, Toronto, 1994

Ziggurat, composer J. Estacio, Pro Coro Canada, Edmonton, 1998

myriad of other student-type activities that held no interest for him. Even before he finished the program, he knew that journalism wasn't his destiny. Decades later, he can look back at that very painful time and realize that those experiences helped him break some of his shyness. "It is only now that I feel comfortable doing that sort of work."

During Timothy's last year in the journalism program, he became seriously ill with what, at the time, was thought to be a life-threatening arthritic condition. This resulted in some rethinking of what he wanted to do with his life. "I decided I wanted to be a classical singer. That if I wasn't going to live that long because of the arthritis, then music was what I wanted to do. If I'd known then that I was going to be fine and live a long time, I would have picked something more lucrative." So even before he had finished the journalism degree at Carleton University, he enrolled in the music program at the University of Ottawa. This total change in direction had its genesis in his earlier life. "I had already been singing on a quasi-professional basis. And I had had a certain amount of early success. I did my first performance of the Messiah with an orchestra when I was 19."

At the University of Ottawa he found his experience at Carleton gave him the ability to fight for the kind of education he wanted, not necessarily the one laid out in the university calendar. He studied languages, theatre, modern dance and music. He graduated with his music degree in 1984.

After graduating, Timothy moved to Banff, to take part in the winter program in the Music Theatre Studio Ensemble at the Banff School of Fine Arts. "I'd never been out west before and I was quite excited about working in a program that was as small as that and had top-notch instructors from around the world." As it turned out, not unlike his previous academic experiences, he didn't quite fit the mould. He trained there for the first year of the program and then spent the second year with the Siding 29 Touring Company. (Banff was known as Siding 29 in the early days of the railroad.) The Company was touring a new chamber opera around rural Alberta. "When I toured from Banff I got to see a lot of the province." After

Awards

- Banff Centre Scholarship, 1984
- Trimac Scholarship Banff Centre, 1985
- Alberta Culture Award, 1986
- Alberta Culture Playwriting Award, 1988 (Second)
- Alberta Culture Playwriting Award, 1988 (First)
- APN Recommendor Award, 1988
- Alberta TV Drama Competition, 1989 (First)
- Jon Whyte Memorial Essay Prize, 1993
- ATP/Chevron Playwriting Competition, 1993
- Alberta Centennial Silver Medallion, 2005
- BookTelevision 3-Day Novel Contest, 2007
- Todd Hanes Pride Award, 2007

Awards—Short-Listed

- Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, 2004
- Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, 1998
- International 3-Day Novel Contest, 2006

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta

the tour went through Edmonton Timothy decided to move to the city. “I didn’t know anybody, I just moved lock, stock and barrel.”

Timothy’s writing career actually began while he still lived in Banff. “There were composers and writers working on these new chamber operas and not all the writers were suited to the work. They wouldn’t know this until they got to Banff and got matched up with a composer.” It was just that kind of a situation that pulled Timothy into the writing world. A musician and acquaintance of Timothy’s was working with Joan McLeod, a writer and poet who later won the Governor General’s Award. The match wasn’t working. Eventually, Joan McLeod went on to work on her own project and Timothy was asked to step in and work with his musician friend. They completed an adaptation of the *Gift of the Magi*. Timothy took composition classes from Louis Applebaum and began writing his own material. The first chamber opera he wrote that wasn’t an adaptation of something else was *Garden Variations*, written with David Parsons. This chamber opera, set in Montreal, went on to win the PRO Canada National Composition award and an Alberta Culture award. Before he left Banff he wrote a show called *Caruso Got There First* that was performed to standing-room-only audiences at the Edmonton Fringe Festival.

Then, Timothy, who was becoming known as someone who could write, was commissioned to write a touring version of *Beauty and the Beast*. Both *Caruso Got There First* and *Beauty and the Beast* won Alberta Culture awards. “I was really very fortunate that my work struck a chord with juries very quickly. As someone new to Alberta and new to Edmonton, I needed to make connections quickly. It’s so hard to do. But if people say, ‘Oh you just won this thing,’ it gives them an entry point into knowing who you are.”

Timothy’s success as a writer in this genre didn’t come as a surprise to him. While at Banff he had gained confidence in his ability to write. “I was always curious as a performer about the way things were put together and keenly aware when they weren’t working in the stage pieces that I

was doing. My sense of structure and scene detail had been honed by years as a performer." Now some of the training as a journalist began to have an impact. "I was already comfortable with the written word. The journalism training meant that I didn't, and I don't, have any prissiness about writing. If I have to write something, I just sit down and write it. If it needs to be revised then I revise it. I have very little patience for the intellectual courtship of the writing."

Timothy is a writer who doesn't put anything down until he is ready. He may actually think about an idea for years before writing a word. This approach to writing means that very often he doesn't even prepare an outline of what he wants to say. "I will think about it. I can feel it taking shape in my head. When I get to writing it, the first draft goes down real fast. My first drafts are quite solid. It is my history that the first draft usually sells."

Because he works from an almost full-blown concept in his head, there is nothing routine about the way Timothy puts time aside for writing. "I have no routine. I can't afford a routine. My sustaining jobs tend to be contracts for teaching courses at colleges and universities that have changing schedules. And there is the theatre work. It is completely impossible to work around. I tend to set myself a deadline and as long as I get it done by the deadline, I don't give a damn how I get there."

And getting there as a literary writer was no more routine than anything else in Timothy's life. While visiting in Toronto and auditioning for *Les Misérables*, he answered the phone in his friend's apartment and found himself talking to Sandra Gavenchuk, an administrator for the Canadian Opera Company. She was looking for the librettist who had worked on some operas with David Parsons. She'd found him. The result was that Timothy became the Librettist-in-Residence with the Canadian Opera Company for a year. He never did finish the auditions for *Les Misérables*, but instead went back to Edmonton and fulfilled his obligations with the Company by commuting back and forth to Toronto.

About the same time, Timothy had gotten to know Betty Gibbs, an editor who did a great deal of work with the Access Network and also worked for both Rowan Books and River/Slipstream Books. She was convinced that if one was a librettist then one must also be a poet. To this point, Timothy had not thought of himself in these terms. In fact, he felt that being a poet involved an entirely different set of skills from that of a librettist. Nevertheless, on a dare he wrote 12 poems. These were meant to prove his point. He gave them to Betty to read. The reaction was explosive and unexpected. She told him that she didn't want to read anything he ever wrote again. Not because it wasn't good, because she said it was very good. But because the subject matter made her intensely uncomfortable. The material he gave her turned out to be the first poems in his book, *Neurotic Erotica*. Although she didn't do any more work on the book, she did see that it was edited and published by River/Slipstream Books.

"Suddenly I was the poster-boy for some kind of anti-establishment poetry. That's not what the book is about. But that's how I ended up in George Melnyk's Literary History of Alberta as a pornographic poet. The book is an idea book about where we find our erotic imprinting and what do we want to do about things that we think shouldn't be allowed and what do we do when the poet lies because he hasn't done those things."

True to form, Timothy found himself a published poet without having to go through the usual process of sending material out to magazines. He still doesn't send material out very often. "I know enough people in the publishing industry and if they are working on a project that I would be suitable for or interested in, they often come to me and ask for something."

He responds to the question Where do ideas come from? with, "If I knew that then everybody could go there and get them, couldn't they? Candas [Candas Jane Dorsey] would love it if I was to say the Idea Bank in Saskatoon, no Regina, no it's in Moosejaw... That's where they put the Idea Bank. Honestly, I have no idea." Part of the problem in answering this

question is that Timothy finds much of what he writes arrives in his head fully formed. "All I do during the writing period is flesh out the details." However the ideas come to him, there doesn't seem to be a shortage of things he wants to write. "I have a line of things that need to be written sitting in my head. They eventually will be written."

The closest Timothy ever got to using a critiquing group to help him was a freelance writing company made up of himself, science fiction writer Candas Jane Dorsey, and children's writer Mary Woodbury. Through his work with that group he was able to see the kind of meticulousness and energy that a writer like Mary Woodbury puts into her work. "Much of my work as a lateral thinker seems to come from nowhere and seeing someone work that diligently at the craft was really important for me. Being able to see to that and understand that I've internalized some of what she does, while she externalizes it. But we still come to the same place in the end." He isn't sure that critiquing groups are really useful. It all depends on the skill of the members of the group. "I've seen too many examples of where the brilliance and the personal spark of a manuscript gets lost when the writer tries to please a committee."

If the "committee" of the critiquing group is not the best place to see the writing come to its full potential, then where should that happen? For him, it should be in a close relationship between the writer and the editor. Timothy worries that that has been lost. "An editor can be incredibly rewarding for a writer because he or she supports them. Editors should support them into becoming the amazing creatures that they are." He is convinced that editors no longer have the luxury of doing that for their writers. "They are discouraged from having that intimate relationship with their authors and I think that explains why a lot of our literature gets homogenized and is really why it gets published before it's ready or before it's had all the facets cut into it to make it brilliant."

So, how does he tell when a piece he is working on is finished? "I can always look at something I've done and think I can make it better now because I keep learning. I was signing a copy of my novel for a student and I said you'll find so many instances of bad writing in this book. The writer I am now would be way more effective. Unfortunately, for me a piece is often finished when I can no longer afford to work on it because I need to move on to something else. That's just the way it is."

Perhaps the intimate relationship between the editor and the writer no longer exists but there is still the relationship of the writer creating and submitting work and the editor either accepting it or rejecting it. Timothy's acting experience and his own work as an editor have helped him understand the relationship. "As a writer I research where I'm sending something before I send it. If there are guidelines, I adhere to them slavishly. There is no point frustrating everybody." Understanding the relationship may be one thing, but when rejection does happen, Timothy says, "I don't like it. When I'm rejected it pisses me off because I need the money and you like to feel that your work is appreciated and that it's getting out there." He has a really important point about the whole issue of rejections: "I don't disrespect the people who have rejected me. I understand that they have their reasons and I respect those reasons. I don't go around saying they're idiots, they don't know what they're doing. That's not true. They do know what they're doing. What I sent them is not right for what they are working on and that's fine."

The opposite of rejection is acceptance. And acceptance can come in the form of awards of one kind or another. "I love awards. I won't pretend that I don't. The reason I love them is that I work in some of the weirdest nooks and crannies of the literary world. I'm not mainstream and that means the biggest challenge is getting people to hear that I've done something. An award does that. It's publicity." He also sees the award as recognition by his peers that they appreciate what he has created. He acknowledges that there are different kinds of awards and some of these are starting to

come his way. In 2005 he was awarded an Alberta Centennial Silver Medallion for his work in the arts community.

While he certainly appreciates receiving an award, it by no means defines success for him. "I come from a fundamentalist Baptist background. One of the positive legacies of that is that my value, it seems to me, has been a question of God. God determines my value. I don't have to please somebody else. The things I do have to please God. So using my talents in a way that has integrity and bringing that integrity to my dealings with students and the people I'm trying to encourage – those are the things that make me feel a success."

Timothy may not have to please anybody but God but that doesn't mean that he doesn't want to have some role as a writer in the community around him. That whole question, he says, "Is so history dependent. It used to be that writers could influence the people who were integral to the power structures because they were the ones who read. It was the educated talking to the educated. They were the ones who read. Now writers are talking to anyone who can read but being able to read is not the same as being educated. The effect now happens at a grass roots level, which makes it more important to get your work out there and get people to read it." In his mind, writers are the philosophers in a way that the politicians of the day no longer are. That makes the writer the conscience of today's society. Having said that, Timothy recognizes that some will immediately cry out that the religious in society are its conscience. "As one of them, I've got to say that can't be true anymore. Not enough people believe. Not enough people see that as something that needs to be developed. It means that you have to be able to reach them on a secular level as well. Writers are essential to society."

So what about the writer who says things that the community doesn't approve? "I don't believe there is a role for censorship. If people are thinking things, I want to know it. You can't deal with secrets. You don't protect children by keeping information away from them, you protect them by

giving them the tools to identify things that they can agree with or disagree with and why. I've read lots of material I kinda wish weren't out there but would I stop them from being there? No, that's dangerous."

Getting his work out there. Exploring different segments of his life and expressing his ideas whether the community is fully accepting of them or not, are all part of the reason Timothy continues to write. "During my MFA, which I just completed, I made a huge amount of progress on several projects, some of which were new territory for me. I never thought I would write a Young Adult novel, but there it is. Glen Huser is my mentor for that project."

Setting goals is something Timothy did earlier in his life and he has accomplished many of them. "I tend not to plan the way I did." Now it is important to finish those things he feels really passionate about. "I have to finish the novel that I started during the BookTelevision show, the three day novel writing contest, which I won. It is a story I had to tell, sparked by the murder of my next door neighbour. So, things that I'm writing I'm really passionate about."

Written March 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.johnballem.ca

John Ballem

John Ballem was born and brought up in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, where his father was a physician and surgeon. "Really," he says, "my father was a classical scholar." John himself read a wide range of classical novels. Moreover, he remembers that his whole family were fans of mystery novels by such writers as P.D. James, Marjorie Allingham and P.G. Wodehouse. John always felt that it would be interesting to write a novel.

Writing that novel took a secondary role in the early days of his career as a lawyer. He was sent to Calgary to work in Imperial Oil's legal department. In Calgary, because the company wanted him to get some "up stream" knowledge, the experience paid off in more ways than one. Later he left Imperial Oil but stayed in Calgary. John has gained a significant reputation among legal experts in the oil and gas industry with articles on oil and gas leases for publications such as the *Canadian Bar Review*. A textbook, *The Oil and Gas Lease in Canada*, University of Toronto Press, is considered by the courts to be the leading authority on the subject.

One of his most interesting experiences was serving as president of the Calgary Zoo. Through this role he went to Africa to put together a program entitled *Diary of the Calgary Zoo*, the first colour presentation for the CBC. There he began to seriously consider writing fiction.

Shortly after coming to Calgary, John was sent to the location of two wild wells, known in the oil patch as the devil's lighter. "The wells made a great centrepiece for a novel. I knew about the bidding for Crown land, how contentious that can be and how secretive everything can be," he says.

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Fiction - Adult

The Devil's Lighter, General Publishing, 1973

The Dirty Scenario, General Publishing, 1974

The Judas Conspiracy, General Publishing, 1976

The Moon Pool, McClelland and Stewart, 1978

Sacrifice Play, Ballantine Books, 1980

The Marigot Run, Ballantine Books, 1984

Oilpatch Empire, McClelland and Stewart, 1985

Death Spiral, Plains Publishing, 1989

The Barons, Gorman & Gorman, 1991

Manchineel, Dundurn Press, 2000

Murder as a Fine Art, Dundurn Press, 2002

The Oilpatch Quartet, Cormorant Books, 2005

A Victim of Convenience, Dundurn Press, 2006

Poetry

Lovers and Friends, Watermark Press, 2000

Forthcoming

Murder on the Bow, 2010 [NEW]

It was two years of writing before John finished his first novel, *The Devil's Lighter*. It was published by General Publishing.

John's law practice has provided considerable fodder for his books. "I would go to these hearings before the National Energy Board or before the courts representing oil and gas producers. I got to know the corridors of power. You find ideas to write about from what you are exposed to." His travels, which have taken him literally to the ends of the earth - to the North Pole aboard a Russian icebreaker and Antarctica - have given him the first-hand knowledge to set novels in Ottawa, the Arctic, the Caribbean, and Calgary.

Before he began writing, his free time was spent with horses and competitive show jumping. Horses frequently appear in John's novels as do light aircraft. The roles played by airplanes can be traced back to his wartime service as a pilot in the Fleet Air Arm. When he stopped his involvement with horses, that block of time was used to write. His writing routine was forced to vary and there were times when a novel was set aside for three to six weeks. While this could have been detrimental, John says, "I never minded ... in a sense it was beneficial because coming back to it was like being a reader." Whether he works at home, in his downtown Calgary office or on holiday, the routine is the same -- he writes from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Then he gives his manuscript to his assistant who types it into the computer and gives him back a copy.

John revises as he writes, sometimes getting feedback from his daughter, who has worked as an editor with Raven House, a publisher of mystery novels. Before the manuscript is sent to his agent it has received at least two full revisions. Then there are the agent's suggestions to consider before sending it to the publisher.

In 2004 John became the sponsor of the Writers Guild of Alberta's Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction. He has written and published at least twenty stories. For him, success is determined by having led an in-

Awards

- Received an award from the Petroleum Law Foundation, 1973
- Starving Romantic Poets Award, 1996
- Distinguished Service Award for Legal Scholarship, Canadian Bar Association and Law Society of Alberta, 2009 [\[NEW\]](#)

Short-listed

- Nominated for the Arthur Ellis Award, 1997

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Crime Writers
- Writers Union of Canada
- Canadian Authors Association

interesting life and doing the things that interest him. As Ken McGoogan, former Books Editor for the *Calgary Herald*, suggested, he has created a record that scholars in two hundred years will turn to, to find out what the industry was really like.

This fulfills one of the roles of a writer as he sees it - a contribution to history. He says, "It is important to capture and record the spirit of the place - not only the physical but the spiritual as well." The other significant role is to entertain the reader by telling a good story.

When questioned about censorship, he says, "Why have censorship? I am very much opposed to the heavy hand of the State. It is dangerous." He admits there may have been times when censorship worked but not anymore. Even if there might be reason to want some control when it comes to children in school, he says, "What's the point, they go home and turn on the TV."

Especially if one includes culture in the phrase "geography of the place," then John is quite willing to say that the setting does influence his writing, both poetry and fiction. He says, "I am very fond of this city." He has set several of his novels in Calgary.

His plans include continuing to travel (in 2009 he travelled to the South Pole, having been at the North Pole in 2005), to practice law -- and there is always another story to tell. He says, "People ask me how do the law and fiction work together. They work together very well - they sort of feed on each other."

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Marty Chan

Marty Chan, the first son of Chinese immigrant parents, isn't an engineer despite his parents' wishes. He grew up in Morinville, where his parents owned and operated a local grocery store. Being an only child until he was 15 and having to work in the store every day created a lonely childhood. To compensate, Marty learned to read early, and by the time he was in Grade 3 he was reading the *Hardy Boy Mysteries*. In Junior High he read *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*.

He owes his love of writing to his High School English teacher. "After taking English with Mr. Nigro, I started to wake up to what writing could be," says Marty. Upon completing High School, the natural move was to Edmonton to the University of Alberta for that degree in Engineering. The problem was, "I majored in keg parties instead of courses. At the end of my first year I received an invitation to take the Dean's Vacation for a year."

A year of moving furniture, bar-tending, and some re-evaluation and Marty returned to university for a degree in English. His second year summer employment was with Sir Unicorn Entertainment, producing weekly murder mysteries. Marty started out as an actor but soon became one of the writers. The fall came and Marty stayed on with the company as head writer. He says, "That was my sweatshop experience." Eventually, he returned to university and completed his degree in English with a minor in drama.

While working for the Government of Alberta in the Tourism department, he got involved with the group Rapid Fire Theatre, performing in an im-

Website

www.martychan.com

Bibliography

Children and Young Adult

The Mystery of the Frozen Brains, Thistledown Press, 2004

The Mystery of the Graffiti Ghoul, Thistledown Press, 2006

The Mystery of the Mad Science Teacher, Thistledown Press, 2008

True Story (illustrations by Lorna Bennett), Ink Jockey Books, 2009 [NEW]

Drama

Canadian Mosaic II, 6 Plays, Simon and Pierre, 1996

Ethnicities: Plays from the NeWest, NeWest Press, 1999

Mom, Dad, I'm Living with a White Girl, Playwrights' Canada Press, 2001

The Forbidden Phoenix, Running With Scissors Theatre, 2003

Where is Here? Vol. II: The Drama of Immigration, Scirocco Drama, 2005

God's Eye, Edmonton Fringe Festival, 2007

Fulcrum of Evil, CBC Radio, 2008

"Maggie's Last Dance," *Love and Relationships* (Volume 1), Playwrights Canada, 2009 [NEW]

Forthcoming

The Mystery of the Cyber Bully, Thistledown Press, 2010 [NEW]

The Forbidden Phoenix (with lyrics and music by Robert Walsh), Playwrights Canada, 2010 [NEW]

prov show called Theatresports. Encouraged by the work, he began to write plays for competitions and the Edmonton Fringe Festival. At first, he says, "I fell flat on my face," but eventually he defined his own voice, found he liked telling comedic stories and began working in other genres.

When the Alberta production of W.O. Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid* was looking for somebody to play Henry Wong, owner of the Chinese cafe, Marty got the part. He then convinced the producers that he would be better used behind the scenes. After the series, Marty was accepted to the Canadian Film Centre's TV drama program, where he studied for a month. Marty says, "working in more than one genre is helpful." Marty now works in radio, TV, theatre and writing fiction.

When finding ideas to write about, Marty is a thief from his own life. His signature play, *Mom, Dad, I'm Living with a White Girl* proves it. He says, "I was so nervous about telling my parents about my white girlfriend that I kept the arrangements from them for at least four months." The play has become a smash hit for him, having been produced in theatres all across Canada and published in two anthologies. It has also had a successful off-Broadway run and been adapted for radio. Marty gets more than one idea at a time -- in fact, on occasion he has worked on as many as five different projects simultaneously.

Marty's wife, Michelle, of *Mom, Dad, I'm Living with a White Girl* fame, is a stage manager for various theatre companies in Edmonton and her hours are often unpredictable. His writing routine fits in well. He is up between seven and eight in the morning. He uses his evenings for reading and research. He says no matter what, "the writing is done during the day so that it always feels as though something has been accomplished in the writing schedule."

Marty is a notorious re-writer. His first draft is written as fast as possible. Next he works through the story making sure the ideas are clear and consistent. Then he works through the story again, tracking the characters to

Awards

- Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award for Best New Work, 1999
- Adams Chinese Theatre Award, 1999
- Arts Achievement Award from the City of Edmonton, 1999
- Horizon Award from the University of Alberta, 2001
- Performance Award from the City of Edmonton, 2004
- WGA Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award, 2004 -- *The Forbidden Phoenix*
- City of Edmonton Book Prize, 2005 -- *The Mystery of the Frozen Brain*
- Diamond Willow Award, Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Award, Saskatchewan, 2008 [NEW]

Short-listed

- Manitoba Young Readers Choice Award, 2008 [NEW]
- Golden Eagle Children's Choice Award, 2008 [NEW]
- Elizabeth Sterling Haynes Award, Edmonton, 2009 [NEW]

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Alberta Playwrights Network
- Playwrights Guild of Canada
- The Writers Guild of Canada
- Young Alberta Book Society
- Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers
- ACTRA.

make sure they are real and make sense. The third track is for dialogue. He checks his characters to make sure they are consistent and don't repeat themselves. His wife is the only person who gets to read every draft he writes.

Awards do not measure success for Marty. He says, "They are nice because they are recognition of the work ... but I am more excited about the nomination than the award." Of success itself, he says, "If I am spending more hours in the day writing than doing anything else, then I consider myself a success."

In spite of the recognition he enjoys, rejection still happens. It is the realization that he has had many successes and his passion for his craft that keeps him writing in spite of rejections, politics, long hours and "lumpy" pay. And it is the experience of writing in more than one genre that keeps writing exciting for him. Marty says, "There hasn't been a day when I've said I want to give it all up."

Out of his passion comes the belief that writers should be an inspiration for students. He wants the students to see, "Sometimes, you have to follow the things that make you passionate as opposed to the things that make you money."

The issue of censorship touches a tender spot within Marty. He feels that everybody has the right to express their opinion on any topic. However, the line between censorship and appropriation of voice is very thin. The latter really gets under his skin as a minority artist. He says, "Although I am a Chinese-Canadian, my experience isn't totally Chinese, it is Canadian as well. If the argument is that Caucasian writers can't write about visible minority themes, then the reverse is also true. That isn't fair to me."

Marty has spent his life living on the edge of the Prairies, but he doesn't see much of a connection between where he lives geographically and his writing. If he is categorized as a "Prairie Writer," he sees it more as a

marketing ploy than anything else. "God forbid," he says, "I could be a Chinese-Canadian-Prairie writer!" No matter how he is categorized, he says, "I hope to continue doing what I am doing."

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Joan Crate

Joan Crate was born in Yellowknife, NWT. She moved numerous times during her school years, ending up in Calgary to attend the University of Calgary for both an Honours undergraduate degree and her Masters in English (with Distinction). After university she moved to Red Deer to teach First Nation's literature, Children's literature and Creative Writing at Red Deer College. In 2006 she returned to Calgary.

As a child some of her favourite books were: *Wild Animals I Have Known*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Magic Pine Cone*, *Beautiful Joe*, *Wind in the Willows*, and *Fog Magic*. As an adult some of her favourites are: *Women of Fortune* by Isabel Allende, *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Tracks* by Louise Erdrich and *Monkey Beach* by Eden Robinson. There are too many poetry books to mention.

Joan didn't have any early ideas of becoming a writer but says, "I always wanted to be in the arts. Creating in all its forms is a tremendously rewarding experience." She began her writing career by writing radio and TV commercials, first in Kamloops and then in Regina. University, family demands and teaching left little time for her writing. In spite of that she had two books of poetry and a book of fiction published. And while she still commutes between Red Deer and Calgary for three days of teaching, she is working on both fiction and poetry, as time allows.

"When you're dissatisfied in your life you have to do something about it," she says. "Either, you address that ... or you change your attitude and decide that you won't pursue writing anymore and be happy with that decision. I did a bit of both." She solved her problem in two stages. First,

Website

www.newestpress.com

Bibliography

Fiction

Breathing Water, NeWest Press, 1989

Poetry

Pale as Real Ladies, Poems for Pauline Johnson, Brick Books, 1989

Foreign Homes, Brick Books, 2001

by taking a sabbatical and secondly, by reducing her college workload to half time.

Joan says, "I write when I feel like it. When I forced it, I found I was writing when I should have been thinking. I need time to think, which is an important part of the writing process." Despite rejecting a strict writing schedule, writing is never far from Joan's mind. "There are times when I find other things to do when I should be writing, but there are times when I am writing and should be doing something else. Like maybe the laundry." In fact, the doing of laundry and spending time with her family as well as teaching play into how she sees herself in terms of being successful. "I don't feel like a successful writer. It [writing] is something I have put around my life rather than being the centre of it. It is one of three or four important areas in my life, but it isn't the only all-important one." This insight does not reduce her sense of satisfaction from her successes, however. "Every time I read something I wrote and years later I still think it's worthwhile, that to me is a small success."

Joan's work has been short-listed for a number of awards. She feels that awards do play into the definition of success. They are part of the critical acclaim she finds gratifying. Nevertheless, she understands the award process and she has a pragmatic attitude toward what awards mean. "For one thing they are really out of your control. Having something out there that we can be actually proud of is perhaps all we can and should strive for."

It is interesting to discover what keeps writers working at their craft. Joan says, "I am a reader as well. I love to read poetry and good fiction. I think that is part of it, appreciating the art ... appreciating the form. Somewhere along the line there is a difference between those who are happy just reading and those who actually want to write. There is an impulse to create something with words. I find it really enjoyable and incredibly frustrating, too."

Perhaps one of the frustrations that create a road block for writers is the

Awards

- Bliss Carmen Award for Poetry, 1988
- Millenium Poetry Competition, sub-TERRAIN Magazine, Fall 2000
- Foreign Homes listed as a “Book of the Year” by Vue Magazine, 2002
- SLS St. Petersburg. Awarded, but declined a scholarship, 2006

Short-listed

- Second Place, Alberta Fiction Competition, 1988
- Writers Guild of Alberta Novel Award, 1989
- Canadian Authors Association Poetry Award, 1989
- Books in Canada First Novel Award, 1989
- The Commonwealth Book Award (Canada) 1989, 2nd place
- People’s Poetry Competition, 1997
- Shaunt Basmajian Chapbook Competition sponsored by Canadian Poetry Association, 1998
- Top placement (first and second) in two short story competitions (Grain and Prairie Fire), 1998
- Honourable Mention Poetry Competition, Amethyst Review, Summer 2000
- Honourable Mention “Short Grain” Competition, Grain Literary Journal, Summer 2000
- Pat Lowther Award, 2002
- Alberta Anthology, Poetry, Professional Category, 2004, 3rd place

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta

issue of censorship. “In some ways censorship makes me nervous because there is a real desire by some to ban works that don’t agree with their particular view of the world. This is particularly true of groups who are threatened by anything that doesn’t support a particular belief system. Seeing literature as merely didactic is an incredibly shallow way to look at it. Literature has many dimensions, not all of which we necessarily understand on a superficial, or even a merely rational level.” However, she also thinks that censorship may have a role in creating a discussion about a piece of writing and the premises by which we might judge it. “I think it’s important to create a public discussion. We can’t have a small group deciding what we should be thinking and why. Group-think is always an easy but dangerous activity.”

Joan still gets a thrill each time she gets that acceptance in the mail. “And, I think it is important to celebrate the successes of others in the writing community as well. If we’ve got that attitude, we’ll keep bringing in new voices, keep being affected; as writers we’ll keep growing. As soon as we decide that some particular styles, forms, or voices aren’t important, then we stop growing.”

Living in a smaller centre did have an effect on her writing. It is one reason why writers’ organizations and writing groups are both important to Joan. “Writers’ organizations provide support to the arts as well as individual support to the writer. It may be a place where those around you understand what it is you’re trying to do despite the fact you’re not making a cent doing it, or it may be a place where work gets critiqued, but both are important.”

When asked whether writers have a larger role in society, Joan felt that they do, but suggested that perhaps it isn’t always a good idea that the individual writer be conscious of having it. She felt being overly conscious of the effect your work may have on society doesn’t always make for good writing. If a writer is too conscious of promoting a particular view, there is the danger that the writing becomes “inauthentic, reflects

you [the writer] less, and a particular position more. The writing becomes less original, less vibrant.”

The future for Joan is one of the balance between teaching, family, having a social life, writing and travelling. “There are still many, many projects I want to work on. And having fun is always high on my list of priorities.”

Written November 2006

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Paulette Dubé

Paulette Dubé grew up in the small French community of Legal, Alberta. Reading and storytelling were important in her home. She remembers having stories like *The Wizard of Oz*, Greek myths and stories by O’Henry read to her.

She started writing as a teenager almost in self-defense. “My family is very creative ... and I always wanted to do something like that.” Although she didn’t send material out to be published, when she was at the University of Alberta, taking creative writing courses, her instructor, the poet Bert Almon, without informing her, sent some of her poetry to the James Patrick Folinsbee Scholarship committee. Paulette received the scholarship. While still in university she sent some poems to an *Edmonton Journal* Short Poetry Contest and she won first place.

Paulette never felt that living in a small town might be a hindrance to getting published. After university and living in St. Albert, she and her husband decided small town life was what they wanted for their son and so they moved to Jasper. As well as her poetry and a novel, she has written short stories, essays and critiques and her work has appeared in journals, magazines and on the CBC, CKUA, the Women’s Television Network and Channel 9 (Neighbour’s Network).

After three books of poetry, her first novel was published in 2002. Being a poet helped, she says. “I had these huge ideas and that was a bit scary but what was comforting was I could edit scene by scene.” After writing prose, her poetic voice changed. “In a novel you get to explore all sorts

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Second Chapter, Don Denton, Banff Centre Press, 2004

First Writes, Banff Centre Press, 2005

Fiction

Talon, NeWest Press, 2002

Five Coyote Ink Prairie Anthology, anthology, 2005.

Poetry

the house weighs heavy, Thistledown Press, 1992

playing the hand, Black Moss Press, 1996

the weight of rocks, Black Moss Press, 1998

The Best of Creativity Rocks!, anthology, World Poetry Press, 2005

Voices of Everyday Women, anthology, Grey Nuns Women's Wellness Program, 2005

First Mountain, Thistledown Press, 2007

of different characters ... you live through that but not in it ... after that, when I wrote poetry it was just easier not to be in the poem."

Recently, Paulette, who writes in French and English, wrote an article about being a francophone living in Alberta for the anthology, *Alberta, un village sans mur(s)* (Presses Universitaires de Saint-Boniface, 2005). "Two languages give me more words to work with -- how can that be a hindrance to a writer?"

"I have a childlike curiosity about the world," she says. Some ideas come from things her students say, others from a file folder with newspaper clippings. And the time to work with those ideas is not a problem either. "I am a teacher half-time and a writer full-time ... you just sit down and bloody well do it."

"Writing is better for me now than when I first started," she says. "It was exciting and scary, mostly scary..." A suggestion for beginning writers is to follow her grandmother's advice regarding life experiences. She told Paulette she needed a lot of chords in her violin to make nice music so Paulette says, "Get some chords in that violin baby and go play." She admits to having had all of the common fears. Now she says, "I enjoy writing so much that sometimes I don't care ... I'm not writing to please anybody."

Paulette doesn't let rejection colour her perception of success. She realizes there a lot of unknown and uncontrollable factors that contribute to the rejection. And she insists even if you get rejected, "you are not any worse as a human being so keep writing."

Similarly, she doesn't let awards influence her. A quick story makes her point. Winning the Milton Acorn Award, she went to Prince Edward Island to receive it. After the ceremony she read with poet John Weir, from Manitoba. Later, a woman approached and began a conversation with John. He introduced the woman to Paulette indicating that she was the award winner. The woman said, "I didn't like your stuff at all" and turned

Awards

- James Patrick Folinsbee Prize in English, 1984
- The Milton Acorn Peoples' Poetry Award, 1994
- CBC Literary Awards, Second Prize for Poetry, 2005

Short-listed

- William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, Stanford University, 2003
- Sunburst Award, 2003
- Georges Bugnet Award for Best Novel, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2003 - *Talon*
- Stephan G. Stephansson Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2008 **[NEW]**

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- The League of Canadian Poets
- The Writers Union of Canada.
- Access Copyright
- Alberta Teachers' Association

back to John. Paulette sums it up by saying, "Awards are a very honourable validation ... but it [writing] is like a disease of some kind, you just have to do it."

She still feels the development of her own voice is elusive. In university, she was told that she had yet to develop her voice. She says she suspects that is still partially true.

She also finds it hard to decide when a piece is finished. At the Sage Hill Writers Retreat, the Saskatchewan poet Don McKay said, "You can always go back and tinker with it [the poem]" She agrees and adds, "It is at the point where you start to tinker with it a little too much, that's when you should stop."

Tackling issues in the greater community fulfills the roles of writer and human being: "I am trying not to have too big a gap between me the person and me the writer. If I am a good person, responsible and acting responsibly, my writing and my being a writer fit right into that." There are community issues that concern her. "I am absolutely flabbergasted when I see blatant stereotyping or racism." If there is a role for censorship, it's in contributing to the elimination of "big demons" such as those. However, when it comes to the censorship of books, if the book has gone through the hands of the author and a reputable publisher then there is no reason for government or school boards to step in. "That kind of censorship has no place."

Despite her role as classroom teacher and having visited classrooms as a writer, Paulette is hesitant to think of herself as a mentor. She acknowledges that she herself has had mentors. Bert Almon, Timothy Findley and Don McKay top her list. But when it comes to thinking of herself as a mentor she says, "I don't think I am established enough." Having said that, she's willing to help anyone who needs it. "I think that is part of our tribe's code."

Paulette has lots of chords in her violin. She hopes her work creates a “little path of light through someone’s dark night.” In the meantime, she will keep on writing.

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Dave Duncan

"I have been informed by fairly reliable sources that I was born in my parents' house in Scotland in the middle of 1933, meaning in the depths of the Great Depression," says fantasy writer Dave Duncan. "I chose this date with care, because it qualified me as belonging to a rare vintage, facing less competition than I should have met in, say, the middle of the baby boom. It also made me too young to fight in the Second World War, young enough to avoid the crowds squeezing into universities just after that catastrophe, and old enough to enjoy my youth during the Eisenhower years, which were something of a golden age. I am also old enough to benefit from advances in medicine during my own golden age and not so young that I shall have to watch the planet collapse under the onslaught of global warming.

"Having got past those first few minutes... I grew up in a small town called Newport, a suburb of Dundee, where I received my high school education." As Dave was growing up, much of the family entertainment came from reading. His parents read popular fiction and Dave "read anything I could understand: Wells, Verne, Kenneth Grahame, comics galore." Teachers added authors such as Dickens and Scott and Thackeray to his reading list. While in school, the thought of becoming a professional writer never crossed his mind. "I did write stories from an early age. Usually they were a parody of whatever I had most recently read. I don't think I ever finished any of them. The idea that his parents might have encouraged him to take up writing makes him shudder." My parents were very unsupportive, for which I am grateful, because it meant that I pursued a career

Website

www.daveduncan.com

Bibliography

Fiction

A Rose Red City, Del Rey, 1987
Shadow, Ballentine Books, 1987
The Reluctant Swordsman, Del Rey, 1988
The Coming of Wisdom, Del Rey, 1988
The Destiny of the Sword, Del Rey, 1988
West of January, Red Deer Press, 1989, Reprint, 2002
Strings, Del Rey, 1990
Magic Casement, Del Rey, 1990
Faerie Lands Forlorn, Del Rey, 1991
Perilous Seas, Del Rey, 1991
Hero, Del Rey, 1991
Emperor and Clown, Del Rey, 1992
The Reaver Road, Del Rey, 1992
The Cutting Edge, Del Rey, 1992
Upland Outlaws, Del Rey, 1993
The Stricken Field, Del Rey, 1993
The Living God, Del Rey, 1994
Demon Sword, HarperPrism, 1995
The Hunter's Haunt, HarperPrism, 1995
The Cursed, Del Rey, 1995
Past Imperative, Avon Books, 1995
Present Tense, Avon Books, 1996
Future Indefinite, Avon Books, 1997
Demon Rider, HarperPrism, 1997
Daughter of Troy, HarperCollins, 1998
Demon Knight, HarperPrism, 1998
The Gilded Chain, Avon Books, 1998
Sir Stalwart, Avon Books, 1999

that brought me a living wage from the day I started work."

"I attended the University of St Andrews (Prince William recently followed my example) and graduated with a BSc in Geology, which was virtually worthless for my chosen career of being a geologist in the oil business. Oil abides in sedimentary rock, and St Andrews taught only the ways of igneous types." Dave immigrated to Calgary, Canada, in 1955 and without having to mention to anyone which type of rock he had studied, he found a job in the rapidly developing oil patch which earned him a comfortable living for the next 30 years.

The story writing didn't start until about 1974 when Dave took a Creative Writing course from Calgary writer Myra Paperny. "I started because I thought it would be fun." During a course on short story writing, he discovered he wasn't really interested in that genre. He abandoned writing for about 10 years, and then tried novel-writing as a hobby. Soon he began sending out manuscripts, and in all he wrote the equivalent of five books before one sold. That sale came just two weeks after a sudden downturn in the oil business put him out of work for the first time in his life. That day he became a full-time writer.

Since then, Dave has sold manuscripts consistently, averaging two sales per year. The majority of his work has been fantasy or some area that's closely related. He's written young adult fantasy, historical fantasy, mystery fantasy, but he doesn't stray too far from his chosen genre. "That is what my readers expect in a Dave Duncan book and if I wandered too far away my publishers would insist that I use a pseudonym." In fact, he has used pseudonyms. As well as writing under the name Dave Duncan, which happens to be the name his parents gave him, he has also written under the names Ken Hood and Sarah B. Franklin. All in all, he has written 10 series and seven stand-alone novels. He has also written three or four short stories, but that was a long time ago.

There is no shortage of ideas for stories. "I start with a character, an open-

Lord of the Fire Lands, AvonEos, 1999
The Crooked House, Avon Books, 2000
Sky of Swords, AvonEos, 2000
Silvercloak, Avon, 2001
Paragon Lost, EOS, 2002
Impossible Odds, EOS, 2003
The Jaguar Knights, EOS, 2004
Children of Chaos, Tor, 2006
The Alchemist's Apprentice, Ace, 2007
Mother of Lies, Tor, 2007
The Alchemist's Code, Ace, 2008
Ill Met in the Arena, Tor, 2008

Forthcoming

The Alchemist's Pursuit, Ace, 2009

Awards

- Aurora Award, Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, 1990
- Aurora Award, Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, 2007

Memberships

- SFCanada (Founding Member)

ing scene or an idea for a different system of magic. Whatever it is, it niggles at me for days, months or years and gradually accumulates layers, like a pearl." In what ever way the ideas are developed, one of the most notable things about Dave's writing is his ability to create new and different worlds in which his characters live.

The actual writing process is pretty straightforward. Dave doesn't write anything until he knows the end of the story. At this point he writes Chapter One. As for the plot, he says, "After 20 years at the game, I hardly need to think about plotting but tens of thousands of words are just as much work as they always were. There is a limit to how much I can write in a day. When I dry up, usually after 1000 or 1500 words, I stop and do something else." Often he works in the morning, which then leaves the rest of the day for that "something else." Regardless of when he writes or how many words he completes, he writes every day because the ideas keep coming. Writing is much like riding a bicycle, you cannot go too fast or too slow."

"Learning to write is very much a process of learning to read, by which I mean learning to read your own work objectively." And learning to do that may come from belonging to a formal critiquing group which allows one to practise on other people's work. Dave has a word of caution, however: "While formal groups can be helpful, writers must have confidence in their own judgement. They must not let other people criticize them into despair." He doesn't belong to a critiquing group but does have several friends to whom he sends drafts of his work. His first reader is always his wife, Janet, who has supported him throughout his career. She reads everything he writes and regardless of what anybody else says, it is to her suggestions that he is most likely to defer.

Despite the number of books written and despite knowing the ending to the story before he writes anything down, revision is still a very necessary part of the writing process. "I write a preliminary draft, revise it extensively the next day, and polish it some more the day after, before adding that day's draft." He considers this his first draft. By the time the story is sent

to the agent to be given to the publisher the work has probably been revised 10 to 12 times.

With all the publication success, and the fact that he works at his craft every day, rejection of a book does still occasionally occur (in fact, twice). Dave says he doesn't handle it really well. Each time the rejection came from an editor who had accepted Dave's previous submission. Both times he revised the work and it sold. Not only that, but each book won an award. "This proves either that rejection is good for the soul or that revision is good for the text."

Twenty-plus years of writing hasn't really made the writing process any easier. "I still enjoy it. It is still hard work. I find it harder than I used to, probably because I keep trying to raise the bar. I will keep writing as long as my books sell."

For Dave, the sale of books, and therefore the ability to make a living from his writing, is perhaps more of an indication of success than anything else. Part of that "anything else" is awards. "Writing is a lonely profession and any kind of applause is welcome. The big awards help to bring fame, of course, the Booker and so on. Semi-prestigious awards like the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's Nebula definitely help sell books to publishers, so they must help sell books to readers. Lesser awards feel good. They're ego boosters."

The sale of books to publishers first and then to the general public is not always as straightforward as it might seem. Censorship or community standards can sometimes become an issue. For Dave the question is not so much "is there a role for censorship" but rather "censorship by whom". "Writers tailor their work to their audiences. Obviously you don't slather obscene language all over a Young Adult romance. Publishers don't have to buy what they don't want to publish. But government censorship is "worse than a crime, it is a blunder" as Tallyrand said in a different context."

Throughout his writing career, Dave has sold 40 novels. Most of those were published while he lived in Calgary. In 200X he and his wife moved to Vancouver Island. Whether Calgary or Vancouver Island, he shows no sign of stopping his writing. But he notes, "At my age just being around in five years will be a triumph."

Additional information was obtained from: "The Uncompromising Dave Duncan" by Tony King An offprint from Dictionary of Literary Biography, Brucoli Clark Layman.

Written January 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.willferguson.ca

Will Ferguson

"I'm not just any Albertan, I'm an uber-Albertan. I didn't grow up in a namby-pamby city. I grew up in the sticks. I grew up in the Footner Lake Reserve area of Fort Vermillion. There were six kids living in that house along with various foster kids and cast-offs of one kind or another. It was a very Northern Irish household. Always a lot of people coming and going." That is the recipe for the creation of one of Canada's best-known humourists, Will Ferguson.

Perhaps it was the growing up in the rough and tumble of three older brothers and two younger sisters, perhaps it was living in a Metis community near a First Nations Reserve in Northern Canada, perhaps it was having a single mother whose Northern Irish heritage made sure that her door was always open to those in need. Whatever it was, Will's path from a person unsure of what he wanted to do to full blown writer is anything but traditional.

Despite the rather convoluted route that he took to get to the place where he became a writer, Will says that there were always books around his house while he was growing up. "When you walked into our house my mum had a bunch of bricks and board bookcases that went from floor to ceiling full of books. There was no vetting at all of what we read. Because there were 6 kids and I had older brothers, I probably read some things that I shouldn't have. We'd go to Peace River where there is a used bookstore and she would give us money and we'd load up boxes of books. My father had a full set of Encyclopedia and they had to be on the bottom shelf. As soon as you could open them, you could look at them."

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Why I Hate Canadians, Douglas & McIntyre, 1997; new edition 2007

I Was a Teenage Katima-victim!, Douglas & McIntyre, 1998

The Hitchhiker's Guide to Japan, Tuttle International, 1998

Bastards and Boneheads, Douglas & McIntyre, 1999

The Girlfriend's Guide to Hockey, Key Porter, 1999; revised as *Clueless About Hockey*, 2007, co-authors Teena Dickerson and Bruce Spencer

Canadian History for Dummies, Wiley, 2000; new edition 2005

How to Be a Canadian, Douglas & McIntyre, 2001; co-author Ian Ferguson

Beauty Tips from Moose Jaw, Knopf, 2004

Hitching Rides with Buddha, Knopf, 2005; UK title, Hokkaido Highway Blues

Beyond Belfast, Penguin, 2009

Coal Dust Kisses, Penguin, 2010

Canadian Pie, Penguin, 2011

Fiction

Happiness, Douglas & McIntyre, 2001

Spanish Fly, Penguin, 2007

As Editor

The Penguin Anthology of Canadian Humour, Penguin, 2005

Other

2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics Closing Ceremonies

Before he finished high school, Will dropped out to take a temporary Manpower job in Saskatoon working in construction. That work didn't last very long and he moved to Dauphin, Manitoba to live with his father. He got a job working in a pizza place, which didn't do much to satisfy him. He moved to Red Deer and finished his high school at Lindsay Thurber High School. He had plans to go to the University of Alberta to study Political Science. But, the Katimavik volunteer program was in full swing in Canada and while still in Grade 12, on a whim, he decided to apply. His application was accepted. This was just too good an opportunity to pass up. "My family doesn't have a lot of money. I love travelling. Katimavik sent you across Canada. They sent me to the Okanagan, rural Quebec and southern Ontario. I thought I would take a year off and then go back to university to study poli-sci. I never did."

While he was still with Katimavik, he discovered the Canada World Youth organization. They organized exchange visits for volunteers working overseas. He signed up and found himself in Ecuador near the border with Peru. It was the time when the Shining Path guerrillas were at their height. "They came into the area where we were on several occasions. We were working on a fresh water project there. The army came in and locked things down several times. When you're 19 it's exciting. Now I would be terrified!" As well as working on the water project, Will taught English to students who would be at the level of Junior High School students in North America.

Travelling outside of Canada changed him. He began to rethink a lot of the views of the world. At that time in Alberta, it seemed that the way to success was to join the Young Conservatives. But his experiences, particularly in South America, made him less comfortable with the political views that seemed appropriate to a young Conservative. "I didn't become a raging Lefty, but I no longer wanted to go to university to study Political Science. It just didn't describe the world that I knew."

Now he was in a bit of a predicament. What was he going to do? This

Awards

- Award for History, Canadian Authors Association, 2001
- Non-Fiction book of the Year, Libris Booksellers, 2002
- Award for Fiction, Canadian Authors Association, 2002
- Leacock Medal for Humour, Toronto Dominion, 2002
- Northern Lights Award for Travel Writing, McLean's Magazine, 2004
- Leacock Medal for Humour, Toronto Dominion, 2005
- Pierre Berton Award for History, 2005
- Wilfred Eggleston Award for Non-Fiction, Alberta Book Awards, 2010
- Leacock Medal for Humour, Toronto Dominion, 2010

Awards – Short-listed

- Leacock Medal for Humour, Toronto Dominion, 2002
- Commonwealth Prize; Canada & Caribbean, 2002
- Leacock Medal for Humour, Toronto Dominion, 2008

reassessment got him thinking about what his dream job might be. He loved to travel. He wanted to do more of it but needed to find a way to get the money to do so. He decided that the two could go together. "I could picture a camera sweeping over this village, so I decided that I would do travel documentaries. I had no background, but I was going to be a film maker!" There were only two places in Canada at that time where one could study filmmaking, Concordia University in Montreal and York University in Toronto. "I went to film school at York and graduated with my BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in 1990. This made me the least employable person. Sadly, I graduated the year before the digital revolution. I was instantly a dinosaur. Everything I learned, film splicing, taping film together...it's like being a really good chimney sweep. It's a skill that doesn't take you very far."

Will admits his life is a series of sudden decisions. "If an opportunity rises up, you grab it, especially if it involves travel. I suppose if you grow up with wealth and opportunity, you just take it for granted. I never had that. It was always a scheme to get these things."

While he was in university, he learned of a program called the Japan Exchange Teachers Program. Coincidentally, at the time he was taking a course in Japanese cinema and the professor told great stories about being in Japan. "I was burning out on film. The workload was really tiring. We'd do story boards and script development, shooting plans and sound mixing. It was very exhausting. So, I thought I'll take a year off and then I'll come back. I went to Japan for a year and stayed for five. I never went back into film."

"Are you sensing a pattern here? I was going to be a politician and then a film maker."

So, travel documentaries were out. He still wanted to find a way to combine travel with making some money. Despite not being an English major or having taken even one Creative Writing course, Will decided that the

ultimate job would be to be a travel writer. "That's got to be the best job ever. Get paid for doing what you like to do."

When Will was in Japan he spent much of his time hitchhiking around the smaller islands. He says he much preferred the more rural areas of the country to the cities. In a bar on one of the smaller islands, he began to tell stories of his travels to a man he met there. His listener's response was to tell him that he should write guidebooks. That would certainly combine travel and some money. He had no idea what he was getting into. "I thought I would be a guidebook writer. That I would work for Lonely Planet writing guides. **Turns out, it's** a lot of work and not my kind of travel. You have to go into a town. You have to know everything. Create a checklist. You have to determine what the main attraction is, when it is open, how much it costs. You have to know where the best hotels and restaurants are. I'm not like that. It wasn't in the cards." There were a couple of significant things that came out of his trip to Japan. The first was his marriage. The second was a contract to write a travel guide.

Will and his new bride returned to Canada where his wife enrolled in a Tourism and Travel program. While she was working on her courses, he had to find a job. He worked for a tour company selling Anne of Green Gables to Japanese tourists. At one point they

found themselves living in St Andrews, New Brunswick, where Will's wife completed her practicum in the well-known tourist destination, the Algonquin Hotel. After her first year, she was posted to Charlottetown, PEI to work in the CP hotel there because of her ability to speak both English and Japanese. Will followed her to Charlottetown where he had to find another job and began working for Avonlea Tours, which specialized in the Japanese market.

Will was working for the tour company and writing that travel guide at the same time. It was the first book he had ever tried to write and it was not going well. "I had never written a book before. I'd never written any-

thing beyond 10 pages except in school before. I didn't realize how overwhelming it is. It was a massive weight."

"I knew the editor of the Charlottetown Guardian because of working for the tour company. I was always trying to get him to do a story. Get some free advertising." The editor responded to Will's suggestions by making one of his own. He suggested that Will write a column on Japanese culture aimed at the Prince Edward Island audience. All of a sudden, Will had his first newspaper column entitled "East Meets West."

Will and his wife were living in Prince Edward Island in the aftermath of the 1995 Referendum and Will was feeling really stressed out about the whole situation. His living abroad had given him a perspective on what was happening that was different from that which seemed to prevail at the time. "I started writing these angry op-ed pieces about the referendum, Quebec and the fraud behind it all. I realized they had managed to change the terms of the debate from what Canada used to be, a French/English nation, but French was now defined by provincial boundaries, which is not at all correct. So, I wrote this angry screed about it but the editor wouldn't run it. I kept pitching these pieces and he kept saying, 'Just stick to your column.'" He told him that what he thought Will was trying to do was write a book. The editor told him that he had developed a really angry and unique voice that was rather unusual.

Will says he realizes now that what he was doing was writing the way he would tell a story. That is, his writing had a very Northern Alberta flavour to it. "In that very oral culture we repeat points and the sentences are short. There is a kind of repetitive nature. Which is how you tell stories, right? Since I was not an English major and never took a creative writing course, I wasn't tainted by the proper way to write an essay." Nevertheless, he kept writing "these pieces." He took the newspaper editor's suggestion and began putting them together in a book.

He still had no idea how to go about getting a book published. He began

buying writers' magazines such as *Writer's Digest* to try and find the information. "It sounded difficult." One of the things that all the magazines agreed on was that editors were swamped. That you better have a really great proposal with sample chapters, table of contents, your bio and have an idea of your target market. "That is a lot of work and I'm not sure I'm really good at it. What really twiggged my interest was that they [editors] meet a lot of people. This is good to know. I got the name of a senior editor at McClelland & Stewart. Instead of sending him a proposal, remember I didn't know you were supposed to send sample chapters so I had written the whole damn thing, I wrote on the outside of the manuscript, 'Alex, here is the book, sorry it took so long' and I signed it Will. I met this editor years later and what happened was, he got the manuscript and said to himself 'Will Ferguson, who the hell is he?'"

Apparently, the editor then went from staff member to staff member asking them if they knew who Will Ferguson was. "He never did admit that he didn't know me." The editor contacted Will and said that the manuscript looked good and made an offer to purchase it. Now Will was in a bit of a pickle. He realized he had no idea what a publishing contract should look like. In an instant of inspiration he said to the editor, "Hang on, I'll run it by my agent." Then he had to find an agent. Many of the agents he contacted didn't even let him finish before they hung up on him. However, an agent in British Columbia let him finish his story and agreed to take him on as a client. She set up a bidding war between McClelland & Stewart and Douglas and McIntyre. In the end it was Douglas and McIntyre that published his book, *Why I Hate Canadians*. The end of the story with McClelland & Stewart comes when Will finally met the editor with whom he had first had contact. The editor told him that he was embarrassed not to remember when they had met. Will looked at his watch and said, "About 30 seconds ago."

Will finally knew what he was going to do in order to make a living. He would become a professional writer. The next question that had to be

answered was, how to do that. The advance on the first book was enough for he and his wife to live for a year. "The advance just covered me to finish my next manuscript and that covered me just a little bit more. It's like rolling a snowball downhill. The key is to keep writing. You can't spend five years between books. If you built houses for a living, you couldn't build a house and then go 'I'm so nackeded I'm going to take a few years off and think about my next house.' If you want to write as a career, if you want to earn a living at it, you have to treat it like that. There is nothing wrong with having a day job and saying 'I'm going to write when the mood strikes me,' but don't complain you can't earn a living. What bothers me are writers who feel they should be able to spend five years on a personal novel and then become bitter that they can't earn a living. I've been working as a writer since 1996. If you want to make it as a career you can."

Will is rather proud of the fact that he has never applied for or received a Canada Council grant. In fact, with the exception of two very small grants, which had to do with travel outside of Canada, and were actually paid to his publishers in his name, he has not received any grants at all. He says the closest he came to having a "real job" since making the decision to be a writer, was work he did for McLean's magazine and the CBC. He wrote travel columns for McLean's for two and a half years. He had a contract for 20 features and he completed the contract. He never was a salaried member of the CBC, but did a few freelance pieces for them. "I realized there were two types of writers: those that like a whole lot of little deadlines, who put a lot of energy into small projects and then move on; and those who like a big project like a novel. They like one big deadline. I prefer one big deadline. I can get swamped by the details of life. Endless deadlines depress me."

It was the circuitous route to becoming a writer that provided some of the ideas for the books that he has written. As just one example he says, "I knew that someday I wanted to go back to Ireland to see if the family

really had a castle." Out of that desire came the book, *Beyond Belfast, A 560 Mile Walk Across Northern Ireland on Sore Feet*. He says each one is different. "Sometimes it's a news story, sometimes a memory. There are times when an idea comes very quickly. The Ireland one took years to bubble up." For most of his writing life, Will says he thought he would stick to non-fiction. Then he was on a book tour and found himself sharing part of the tour with an author who had written a self-help book. Will's attitude toward self-help books is that most of them don't help. An idea began to form in his mind while on the tour, what if somebody wrote a self-help book that actually worked. He then had to decide who the main character would be. He decided it would be an editor whose own life was a mess. "It took me a good six months to outline it."

Getting ideas is one thing, but turning them into stories is quite another. Will says, "I don't have a writing routine. I have kids. Nothing is routine when you have kids." Before he had children his writing time was at night. There would be times when he would write all night and sleep all day. "That ended when we had kids." Now he gets up in the morning and takes his children to school. He will work for a couple of hours while the children are at school. "I try to get as much done as possible while the kids are away." In the evening he will look over what he has done during the day or do some research.

Will always works from an outline. "The more detail in the outline, the less writer's block you'll run into." While he believes in using an outline each time he starts a new project, he doesn't allow it to become a straight jacket that stops his story going in a direction he didn't expect. It is his belief that when it comes to revision, the more work one has done on the outline, the less editing one has to do later. "An outline really helps you save time." However, an outline is not a substitution for revision. He admits that his revisions can get rather messy. "Some people say that a book is never finished but it is abandoned. For me, often the book is finished when the deadline arrives. It is clearer with non-fiction than it is with fic-

tion. I'm a bad one for tinkering. I don't think I ever quite let go."

"I never met another author until I was published." It is for this reason and not any ideological one that Will has never belonged to a critiquing group. "By the time I started, the decision to become a writer and then get published happened very rapidly. I'd been writing these newspaper columns and you don't need a critiquing group to write a column. Then I got that contract right away." In spite of not ever belonging to a group,

Will does have editors who work with him on his books. "Editing is a kind of critiquing in a sense, just not in a circle."

In spite of not knowing any other writers or belonging to a writers' organization or a critiquing group, Will has gone from writing newspaper columns in Prince Edward Island to being a sought-after national personality. With all of the experience he has accumulated, he finds that the writing is both easier and more difficult than it was when he made the decision to become a writer. "It is easier now because I know there is a contract and there will be a book. I didn't start off with high expectations, and I've achieved more than I ever dreamed of." What makes it harder is that in the beginning there was a sense of the urgency. There was a pressure to get that book written and get on to the next thing because the money was not secure. "The more financially secure you are, the less there is a monkey on your back. I'm not complaining, but sometimes that sense of urgency isn't there anymore. I miss that."

Will Ferguson has written a total of 14 books to date. As he worked his way through these books he realized that he was changing. "I started out very angry. But I began thinking in a more rounded way. Writing makes you more balanced. If something is going to be out there, not fiction, you had better think it through. It forces you to think."

And one of the things he has thought about is censorship. "Freedom of expression doesn't mean you can yell fire in a crowded theatre or pro-

mote hate against a group. There are gradations. I don't feel that freedom of expression is carte blanche. However, when it's not cut and dry, you go with expression."

Another is what he will be doing in five years. "If you had asked me at a different time, I would have had 100 different suggestions. Now I will be doing much the same as I am now. I'm kinda in a groove."

Written February 2011

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Cheryl Foggo

When Cheryl Foggo was growing up in Calgary, her mother would read to her and her five siblings every night. Later, Cheryl read *Black Beauty*, *Anne of Green Gables*, the *Narnia* series, the *Hardy Boys* series, the *Nancy Drew* series, *Trixie Belden*, *Hurray for Me*, *The Pink Dress* and the thirty volume children's series that accompanied the World Book Encyclopedia. As an adult some of her favourite books are: *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, *Lightning* by Fred Stenson and *African American Values: Classic Moral Stories*.

Cheryl's interest in writing started in Grade 3 at Bowcroft Elementary School. Her teacher, Mrs. Tucker, read her story, "My Brother and I," to the class. Then the principal read it to his Grade 6 class. She says, "I could be in Grade 3 and be this insignificant blob in the school but then communicate with people who were older than I was ... through writing." Cheryl says, "I was always writing. My mother and grandmother were good writers..."

She approached the editor of *Calgary Magazine*, Penny Williams, with some ideas regarding Black history in Alberta. Ms. Williams responded positively and Cheryl began publishing journalistic pieces in *Calgary Magazine*, *Western Living*, *Herald Sunday Magazine*, and *Canadian Consumer*. She continues to publish in markets such as the *Calgary Herald*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Alberta Views*, *Legacy*, *Canadian*.

Cheryl's roots run deep in the Black history of Alberta. Her maternal great-grandparents came from Oklahoma. Most of her family settled in

Website

www.kidscan.com

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Pourin' Down Rain, Detselig/Temeron Books, 1990

Non-Fiction – Anthologies

The Wild Rose Anthology of Alberta Prose, University of Calgary Press, 2003

Weaving A Country, Pacific Educational Press, 2004

Unsettled Pasts—Reconceiving the West Through Women's History, University of Calgary Press, 2005

Chinook Country, Detselig/Temeron Books, 2005

One Step Over the Line, University of Alberta Press, 2008

[NEW]

Fiction — Anthologies

Alberta Rebound, Newest Press, 1990

The Road Home, Reidmore Books, 1992

Young Women's Monologs From Contemporary Plays, Meriwether Publishing Ltd., 2004

Drama and Documentary

Carol's Mirror, National Film Board of Canada, co-written with Clem Martini, 1991

The Journey of Lesra Martin, National Film Board of Canada, 2002

Television

North of 60, 1996 -1997

Radio

Heaven, 2004

Saskatchewan, but two great-uncles settled in Amber Valley, east of Athabasca. Her journalism was a means to acquire credentials for working on her family's history in western Canada. She had been collecting stories from her grandparents and great aunts since she was a young adult. Now she was ready to start work on her first book, *Pourin' Down Rain*.

After publishing *Pourin' Down Rain* she began to write for television. Currently, she is working on a new documentary about the Black Canadian prairie pioneers, writing a novel and co-writing a magazine piece with her husband and daughter.

In non-fiction, ideas come easily, "partly because I do historical writing about a community that existed but has been written about very little." In fiction, she draws from the people and world around her.

Among Cheryl's significant writing credentials, she had successful screenings of the NFB documentary *The Journey of Lesra Martin*, which she wrote and directed, at the Calgary, Atlantic and Vancouver Film Festivals, all in 2002. The film then went on a successful national tour before being screened at the Hollywood Black Film Festival and shown on the CBC's *Passionate Eye*.

In Grade 7 she met fellow student, Clem Martini, who she says, "was much more optimistic about becoming a writer than I was." A friendship, which began with an interest in reading and writing, has become a lasting marriage. They have two daughters, both serious about their own writing.

Sometimes Cheryl writes in the morning, sometimes she works well into the night. Of revision, says Cheryl, "I love the process of perfecting something, but when it is time to let it go -- it goes." *Pourin' Down Rain* was revised about six times. *One Thing That's True* was revised 13 times. It is the most she has ever revised a book and it is the most successful book she has ever written.

Writing is easier now than when she began over 20 years ago. "You learn

Children's and Young Adult

One Thing That's True, Kids Can Press, 1997

I Have Been in Danger, Coteau Books, 2001

Turnaround, Eldridge Publishing Company, 2001; (co-author Clem Martini)

Theatre

Turnaround, 1999/2000

Heaven, 2001

Awards

- Best Film, Guidance and Counselling category at the International Education Film and Video Festival, Birmingham, Alabama, for *Carol's Mirror*, 1992
- Gold Apple award at the 22nd National Education Film and Video Festival, Oakland, California, for *Carol's Mirror*, 1992
- Award of Merit at the AMTEC Media Festival in Vancouver for *Carol's Mirror*, 1993.
- Le Prix du Meilleur, Martinique, West Indies for *Carol's Mirror*, 1993
- Great North Productions The Beat Television Writing Competition, 1995
- Overall Achievement Award, Black Achievement Awards Society of Alberta, 1998
- Chris Award, Columbus International Film Festival, 2003, for *The Journey of Lesra Martin*.
- Harry Jerome Award for Achievement in the Arts, 2008 [NEW]

that you'll go through periods of time with every project where you think it is not working ... I've been through that so many times now it doesn't frighten me any more." And in the end, if something gets rejected, "I'm not one of those people who gets three rejections and puts it aside."

Receiving awards or award nominations, although enjoyable, doesn't define success for her. It doesn't mean she is a better or worse writer than anybody else. She says, "I like getting awards, it's fun to have reporters calling, but more important to my sense of success is feeling that I have written something that is as good as I can make it."

"Writers play a huge role in the larger community on every level, in the economy, the political community, the cultural landscape. It is one of the things I like about being a writer." Cheryl points to the effect of *Anne of Green Gables* on the economy of Prince Edward Island. Similarly, she points to the effect that J. K. Rowling's books have had on reading world wide.

Cheryl's experiences with censorship have sometimes been subtle -- having the capitalization of "Black" removed in an article that she's written. "Censorship can also be about not being allowed to have a voice...more than once I've been told that there aren't enough Black people in Canada to justify publishing or producing my work."

When it comes to mentors Cheryl gives foremost credit to her husband, the Calgary playwright Clem Martini, whom she met in Grade 7. When Clem went to Montreal to study playwriting at the National Theatre School she realized how serious he was about his writing. He in turn encouraged Cheryl. "This is going to sound really corny and lame but Clem is largely responsible for me making the leap from thinking a writing career would be nice but impossible to thinking that it would be possible." Cheryl also acknowledges the influence of Penny Williams and Andrew Wreggitt.

Short-listed

- Alberta Motion Picture Industry Awards, best dramatic script for television, for *Love Hurts (North of 60)*, 1998
- Dr. Betty Mitchell Theatre Awards for *Turnaround*, 1999
- Theatre BC National Playwriting Competition, for *Heaven*, 2000
- Dr. Betty Mitchell Theatre Awards, for *Heaven*, 2001
- Best documentary script, Alberta Motion Picture Industry Awards, for *The Journey of Lesra Martin*, 2002
- *I Have Been in Danger*, nominated for the R. Ross Annett Award for Children's Literature, Writers Guild of Alberta, the Silver Birch Award, Ontario and the Golden Eagle Award, Alberta.
- *One Thing That's True*, nominated for the 1997 Governor General's Award for Children's Literature as well as the Mr. Christie Book Award, the Blue Heron Award and the R. Ross Annett Award.

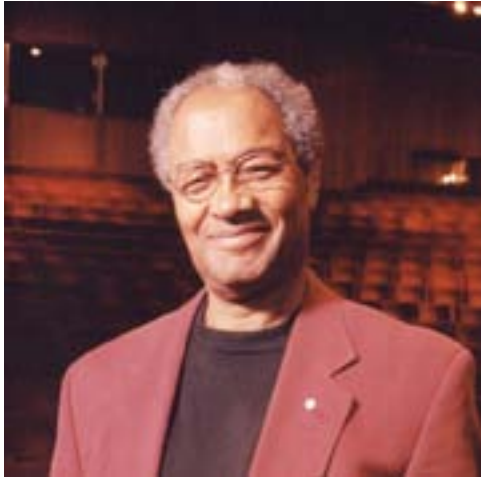
Cheryl also takes seriously her own mentorship role: "Sometimes I love going into schools and sometimes I get shy for some reason and find it hard to do." In the summer of 2004, she was one of two of the Blue Pencil Editors for the Writers Guild of Alberta's YouthWrite. "I still get e-mails from some of the participants at that camp," she tells me.

The geography of the area in which she lives includes the culture and history of the place as well as the landscape. "I would have to say, although I don't write about wheat fields waving, where I'm from has a huge impact on my writing. It is about being from here and not somewhere else. It is about having long, long roots in this part of the world. It is a very important part of me as a person and I can't get away from myself as a writer."

Cheryl is working on an adult novel - her first. If the experience is positive then she says, "Who knows, in five years I could be focusing on a particular form instead of jumping around. In any case, "this novel is a sort of *Rite of Passage*." Pun intended.

Revised January 2010

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Fil Fraser

Fil Fraser, who was presented with the Order of Canada in 1991 for being the first Black broadcaster in Canada, was born in east-end Montreal, growing up in a mixed immigrant/French community. Reading and literature were a dominate influence during his early years -- he remembers reading about the Greeks and Romans. The family was also immersed in the news of the world around them. "My father was a great news junky, just as I am, and by the time the Second World War broke out I was old enough to understand what was going on in the world and I was fascinated."

Before leaving high school, Fil was involved with a lifelong love: broadcasting. As a student he appeared on CJAD's afternoon teen program *Club 800*. His first full time radio job came in Toronto when Foster Hewitt asked him if he could run a control board. Never having done it, Fraser said he could. Eventually, Fil moved back to Montreal and worked at CFCF. Fil says, "Being black in the 1950s ... I was seen as quite exotic. Here was this kid who spoke both English and French, could read a news cast or a sports cast and people would feel good about having me there. There was tokenism involved. I knew that."

In 1958 he moved from Montreal to Regina, where he worked in Public Relations for Saskatchewan Power, founded the *Regina Weekly Mirror* and became Supervisor of Education for the Saskatchewan Bureau of Alcoholism. In 1965 he moved to Edmonton to take a position similar to the one he held with the Saskatchewan Bureau.

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Founder of *Regina Weekly Mirror*

Alberta's Camelot, Culture & the Arts in the Lougheed Years, Lone Pine Publishing, 2003

Running Uphill: The Fast, Short Life of Canadian Champion Harry Jerome, Dragon Hill Books, 2007

Radio & Television

Open-line radio shows, CJCA 1974-79

Morning radio shows: CKXM, Edmonton: 1980-83;
CKUA: 1983 - 85; CBC: 1971- 73

Sound Biography of Tommy Douglas, CBC, 1958

Program Manager & Senior Producer for MEETA,
educational TV, forerunner of Access TV, 1969-71

Co-anchor, *CBC Television Supper Hour*, 1971-73

Summer host, *Take 30*, 1972

Host, *Fil Fraser Show*, ITV, 1974

Film

20 documentary films for TV

Why Shoot the Teacher, 1975

Marie Anne, 1977

The Hounds of Notre Dame, 1980

Years earlier, while attending McGill University, he had taken a creative writing course in which he wrote the first required short story. The professor handed it back to him and said, "I don't need to see more from you." He passed! Fil didn't write another short story until he was living in Saskatchewan, when a story he submitted to the *Western Producer* was published. He didn't write more fiction until recently -- "It isn't ready for prime time yet. Fiction, I believe, is highly personal." His non-fiction, on the other hand, has appeared in the *Toronto Star*, the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, in essays on various topics and many editorials for radio. His first non-fiction book (*Alberta's Camelot, Culture & the Arts in the Lougheed Years*) was published in 2003. His biography, *Running Uphill: The Fast, Short Life of Canadian Champion Harry Jerome*, is the basis for a feature documentary by the National Film Board.

Fil says his writing routine is simple: "I find blocks of time and then just shut everything out. I get up early in the morning and hit the ground running. The writing tank is full. After about five hours the writing tank is dry and I go do something else."

Of his method of working, "The first words I write ... anytime I start a new project are 'Notes For.'" Once he has something on paper he insists that it is really important to sleep on it. "I'll come back to it with fresh eyes and see all sorts of things that I missed. I go at the piece three or four times that way." Once he is satisfied with the piece his wife reads it. She is the last one to see a piece before it goes out to the world.

Fil's been fortunate when it comes to rejection. "I had a wonderful life in broadcasting and never had a rejection for anything I ever wanted to do. That is highly unusual today."

Success for Fil doesn't equal money but how well he's succeeded in communicating his thoughts to others. "Writing always involves two people: writer and reader. If you're not connecting with the reader you are wasting your time."

Awards

- Order of Canada, 1991
- Lifetime Honorary Director, Banff International Television Festival, 1996
- Alberta Achievement Award, 1978
- AMPIA Dave Billington Award, 1990
- Harry Jerome Award, 1999
- Edmonton Cultural Hall of Fame, 2005

Memberships

- Canadian Association of Black Journalists
- Writers Guild of Alberta

As for his attitude toward the awards he has received, “they make me feel very warm. I was overwhelmed, though, when the University of Alberta gave me an honorary Doctor of Letters degree in June, 2008.” He cites a piece he wrote about growing up as a black child in east-end Montreal; of the article, which appeared in *Saturday Night* magazine between pieces written by Pierre Berton and Robertson Davies, he said he felt that for years that somebody (God) had made a terrible mistake. He grew up feeling very much like an outsider. “The recognition that I’ve had, most of which came as big surprises, brought me slowly to the realization that I am not an outsider. I am part of this crazy country and happy....”

And as part of this country, he founded the Alberta Film Festival (1974), the Banff International Television Festival (1979), played a leading role in the development of public policy as a member of the Alberta Task Force on Film, the Canadian Multicultural Council, the Federal Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, the Citizen’s Forum on Canada’s Future (Spicer Commission) and as a Governor of the Canadian Journalism Foundation, to name a few.

Fil says, “We communicate more and more in clichés, which mean different things to different people and nothing to a lot of people. We need to find a new way to communicate across the gender, the ethnic, cultural and age divides that separate us.” That is the role of the writer.

Reaching across those barriers as a mentor “is a tremendous and scary responsibility, one that you can’t duck.” He says that mentors are often people you don’t realize are in that role until long after they are gone. His father was a great role model and mentor for him. And specific to his broadcasting career, Rheo Thompson was the one person at CFCF who didn’t laugh when Fil said he wanted to be a radio announcer.

Fil’s extensive background in human rights gives him the experience to see censorship as a balancing act. “No one has absolute freedom ... the trick is to find the balance where my freedom doesn’t impair yours.” He

suggests there are things on TV and in the movies that society doesn't need to see. "The explicit exploitation of violence dumbs us down."

Fil's future looks busy. "I have some 'real writing' to do. I can't do it while I am doing other things. "In addition to teaching a graduate course in Canadian Film Policy at Athabasca University, he is currently chairing a fund raising drive for the Michaelle Jean Chair in Canadian Caribbean and African Diasporic Studies at the University of Alberta.

Another of Fil's pre-occupations is the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Arts Awards. In 2004 Fil, Senator Tommy Banks, Jenny Belzberg, the Late John Poole and a group of citizens, inspired by the late Lois Hole, raised a million dollars to, in her words, "raise the profile of the arts in Alberta". The Alberta and Federal governments matched the funds and the endowment started out with 3.2 million dollars.

The plan called for up to three \$30,000 awards, "for excellence in the arts" every other years. The first awards were held at the Banff Centre in 2005. The winners were playwright John Murrell and architect Douglas Cardinal. Municipalities were invited to bid on the right to host the awards, based on what they would do to promote the arts in their community. Lloydminster was successful in 2007. Winners that year were Greg Hollingshead, Isabel and Tom Rolston and One Yellow Rabbit Theatre. In 2008, with a surplus of funds, the Foundation awarded prizes of \$ 10,000 each to 10 emerging artists. Grande Prairie hosted the awards in 2009 where writer Rudy Wiebe, Art Gallery Director, Joan Stebbings were awarded the \$30,000 prizes. St. Albert will be the host in 2011. "I'm very proud to have been a part of the creation of the awards", Fraser says. "We started this during the Klein era, when the arts were really under attack."

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.touchwoodpress.com

Cecelia Frey

Cecelia Frey was born on a homestead near Whitecourt. At an early age she moved to Edmonton, where she spent her childhood, attended the University of Alberta and began her career, first as a Social Worker, then with the Edmonton Public Library. In 1967, along with her husband and young family, she moved to Calgary. Having lived most of her life in the province, Cecelia considers herself a true Albertan.

Cecelia didn't grow up knowing she wanted to be a writer, although she does remember lugging bags of books home from the library with her sister. Perhaps it was her strong sense of responsibility to tell the stories of those who could not tell their own, perhaps it was fun, or curiosity, or a growing need for self-expression, but after she moved to Calgary, Cecelia began to write with a more serious sense of dedication. Even so, she was aware that her new pursuit was not a typical one: "In those days, saying you wanted to be a writer was like saying you wanted to be a rock star."

When Cecelia started writing there weren't a lot of places to get help. She took a course from W.O. Mitchell and soon became immersed in the famous Mitchell freefall method. She submitted her first novel, *Breakaway*, to the first New Alberta Novel Contest, sponsored by *Alberta Culture*, which resulted in subsequent publication. It was to be eight years before her next publication. "Perhaps, if I had joined the writing community then, taken courses and workshops, I could have cut my apprenticeship short," she comments. However, the demands of life and family took their toll on her writing time, as did a Masters degree in English, which she completed in 1985. While working on the Masters program and juggling

Bibliography

Fiction

Breakaway, Macmillan, 1974

The Nefertiti Look, Thistle-down Press, 1987

The Love Song of Romeo Paquette, Thistle-down Press, 1990

Salamander Moon, Snowapple Press, 1997

The Prisoner of Cage Farm, U of C Press, 2003

A Fine Mischief, Touchwood Press, 2004

A Raw Mix of Carelessness and Longing, Brindle and Glass Publishing, 2009 [NEW]

Poetry

the least you can do is sing, Longspoon, 1982

Songs Like White Apples Tasted, Bayeux Arts Inc., 1998

And Still I Hear Her Singing, Touchwood Press, 2000

Reckless Women, Ronsdale, 2004

Under Nose Hill, Bayeux Arts, 2009 [NEW]

Non-Fiction

"Phyllis Webb: An Annotated Bibliography" in *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors*, ECW, 1985

Organizing Unorganized Space: Prairie Aesthetic in the Poetry of Eli Mandel, unpublished Master's Degree thesis, University of Calgary, 1985

Drama

The Dinosaur Connection, CBC, 1988

Frankie and Connie, Alberta Culture, 1988

the demands of her growing family, she began to write poetry. "I could manage to fit that focus into my life," she says. The result was her first book of poetry, *the least you can do is sing*.

Her Masters degree completed and her children becoming more independent, Cecelia was able to devote more time to writing. She worked as a freelance writer and editor and began teaching creative writing courses. She co-ordinated the Calgary Creative Reading Series, with Tom Legg, and was an editor for *Dandelion* magazine. She also began to write short stories which she sent out to various magazines and which later were collected into *The Nefertiti Look*.

In the late 80s, she took a playwriting course offered by Theatre Calgary and given by Calgary playwright Gordon Pengilly. This led to her winning a couple of playwriting competitions and having a play produced on the CBC's *Vanishing Point*. She also began working on novels again. Although Cecelia has no regrets about trying different genres, she does feel the process is time-consuming. "The problem with working in different forms is that every time you start a new one you have to become an apprentice all over again."

Because she believes that critiquing groups serve to shorten this apprenticeship, writers' groups are an important component of Cecelia's writing life. She's a strong supporter of courses given through services such as the Department of Extension at the University of Calgary or The Calgary Board of Education or through organizations such as the Alexandra Writers' Centre Society.

Such groups are important in ways other than writing. "You meet other writers who have similar interests, who can empathize with your experiences. Educate yourself the best you can for the job," is Cecelia's advice for beginning writers. "Go to workshops, seek out a mentor, get out among other writers, learn your craft, work hard."

Awards

- Choice Words 21st Annual Playwriting Competition, one-act category, 2nd place, Alberta Culture, 1988
- Second Annual Writing For Radio Competition, 2nd place, CBC and Alberta Culture, 1988
- WGA Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction, 1988
- WGA Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction, 1991
- WGA Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction, 1998

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- League of Canadian Poets
- Alexandra Writers Centre Society (Honourary Member)

Success for Cecelia is being able to live life on your own terms. For her the terms are very much work related. "I'm a writer," she says. "That's what I do." Since her first novel and her first collection of poetry, she has gone on to publish three more collections of poetry, two more novels, and three collections of short stories, along with plays and non-fiction.

Cecelia affirms that her work has been influenced by the geography in which she lives. "It's major for me," she says. "It takes on a muse-like quality."

While her work has had its share of recognition, receiving awards does not play a role in her own definition of success. "They're nice, I don't deny it, but within myself I know what I've written." She does acknowledge, however, that from a sales point of view awards probably help.

When dealing with the issue of censorship she says, "Well, are we dealing with the banning of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* or with child pornography on the web, two very different issues. We have to be wary of state control in all areas of our lives. At the same time, we live in a community and we have to take responsibility for the well-being of everybody."

But she doesn't want to take on a moral role with her writing. "The major social role of my writing is to document a place in time. And, of course, my place in time is Alberta in the late 20th and early 21st centuries."

These days she and her husband, John, own and operate a publishing company, Touchwood Press. "I always thought it would be fun to have complete control of a project," she says, "from font to cover design." Note: Submission to Touchwood Press is by invitation only.

Revised October 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Richard Harrison

When discussing where ideas come from, it is easy for Richard Harrison to list off childhood, his family, hockey, comic books, news, other writing, and friends. "I think I can tell you where any individual idea comes from," he comments. "All of the above and then some. The interesting thing about this question is that of the ideas that I think would make good poems – some of them do and some of them don't. You can't tell which until you start writing from them."

Richard has always been immersed in words and ideas. His mother and father, both English immigrants to Canada, settled in Toronto, where Richard grew up. His mother was a trained librarian who worked in the same primary school that he attended. "She had the librarian's joy in and for books." She also had a love of storytelling and would read regularly to both Richard and his brother. One of the books he remembers her reading was *Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame.

His father, too, loved language. He committed to memory much of the work of Tennyson and Dylan Thomas as well as numerous passages by Yeats, Robert Browning and Shakespeare. Before moving to Canada, he cut an album of recitations of Robert Browning's poems. "From him I certainly got the sense of the meaningfulness of language that became a part of me."

With this family as background, Richard became an avid reader. He read everything from Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll to Marvel and DC Comics. He also read Robert Graves's *I Claudius*, the Narnia books, and

Bibliography

Poetry

Fathers Never Leave You, Mosaic Press, 1987, reprinted, 1989

Recovering the Naked Man, Wolsak & Wynn, 1991

Hero of the Play, Wolsak, 1994

Big Breath of a Wish, Wolsak, 1999

Hero of the Play, 10th Anniversary Edition, Wolsak, 2004

Worthy of His Fall, Wolsak, 2005

Non-Fiction

Numerous articles and reviews

Radio & TV

Morningside, CBC, 1994

Adrienne Clarkson Presents, 1995

Hockey—A People's History, 2006

Tolkien. He went beyond what he was given in school, reading poets of his own choosing. The poetry reading “certainly blossomed when I went to Trent University in 1976.”

Not only did the reading of poetry blossom at Trent but so did his interest in writing. Despite the fact that he enrolled in the Science program, he was frequently invited to on-campus readings by a wide range of authors. These events included a pre-reading dinner with the guest author and often a get-together for drinks afterward. Richard met writers such as Margaret Laurence, Bill Bissett, W.O. Mitchell, Adele Wiseman, Patrick Lane, Susan Musgrave and Robert Kroetsch. These events “Really, really inspired my sense of where writing could go, what writing could do. It is in those years at Trent that I found my love for literature as opposed to science as what I wanted to do with my life.”

In this nurturing climate there were a number of young writers who were trying out all sorts of innovations with their writing. “Writers were doing performance poetry back in the ’70s. It was great, very exciting and very energetic. They cared enormously about writing.”

Richard tried writing as a youngster but the results were always very stilted. Then, while on an archeological dig the summer between high school and Trent University, he began writing to amuse himself and some of the other workers. “At that point I thought it was just fun – something to pass the time. I would write poems about the sky and the work that we were doing. All that latent stuff about the poems from my childhood started to find expression. That’s when I actually started to write stuff down.”

At Trent University he found exactly what he needed. He sent material to the student newspaper and it was published. Then he started to send poems to the magazines. About a year after he began sending poems out, he was one of three writers to win the Harbourfront Discovery Prize, and was published in *Toronto Life*. He thought he was on his way. He sent out some more poems and got a few accepted but most were rejected. He

Awards

- Harbourfront Discovery Reading Prize, Harbourfront, 1978
- Milton Acorn Prize, 1988
- Markin/Flanagan Writer-in-Residence (Canadian), University of Calgary 1995-96
- W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Prize, City of Calgary, 2000

Awards—Short-listed

- Governor-General's Award for Poetry, 2000
- Stephan G. Stephannson Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2000

tried again and sent out a lot more pieces. None of them was accepted. "So I said, okay, this is tough, and took a break from sending material out." He didn't take a break from writing, however. By the early 1980s he began sending material to the magazines again and this time he got his work published. In 1987 his first book was launched.

At Trent there were people who encouraged him "Because they saw the work and knew that it was worth pursuing and they said 'I respect you as a poet. You happen to be my student and I respect you in that vein as well, but you are also this poet-person – away you go.'" There were others besides those at the university who fulfilled the role of mentor: "I think everybody is made up of a hundred influences," he observes. Some of those influences came from writers such as Margaret Laurence, Adele Wiseman and Timothy Findley. "These people were tough on me, and good on them for being that way. They said, 'Okay, you've got these things to do and you need to learn how to do them.'" Ken Sherman at Mosaic Press rejected Richard's first manuscript four times. "These people were and are mentors. They taught me a lot."

The role of mentor is one that Richard understands from his own teaching role. In 1995 he moved to Calgary after being named the Markin/Flanagan Writer-in-Residence (Canadian) at the University of Calgary. Upon completion of that residency, he became a Creative Writing and English instructor at Mount Royal in Calgary. "When somebody does something really well and I know that they've learned 1, 2, 3 things or picked up the spirit of what they needed to do, or had a little more faith in themselves because I was able to use my position as a teacher for them to believe a little bit more, push a little harder, when one of them gets something published, one of them gets nominated for a book prize, and I've had a hand in who they have become (because they let me), it is the most sinless pride that I can feel. It's not me, it's not for me, but it's like wow!" Much like Margaret Laurence and Timothy Findley and others did for him in passing on the tradition, now Richard feels it is his obligation to do the

Memberships

- League of Canadian Poets

same. "If I teach somebody something and it becomes part of their way of life then it will last. If I've allowed it – the writing, the love of writing, you know, the desire to make words into art– to pass through me, then I've done some good."

The students in his composition class often suggest that the classes are really creative writing classes. And Richard agrees: "It's all about making something." Which is how he approaches his own work. He writes essays, poetry and short stories. And as he has always enjoyed both drawing and painting, he enjoys creating comics as well. In fact, he and colleague Lee Easton recently offered the first course in the Comic Book as Literature within the English Department at Mount Royal.

Of the relationship between the different genres in which he works he says, "It's like any family, sometimes they help each other, sometimes they squabble." He has discovered that drawing is an art of silence while writing is an art of speech. "I found a territory for them but they still encroach on one another. When I'm drawing I'm completely out of my speech act mind. When I'm writing it is easier to flip back." He says that poetry and essay-writing feel like cousins but fiction writing still feels much different. Maybe the working title of a piece he wrote for a book of essays by Carol Malyon (published by Mercury Press) sums up Richard's feelings about whether or not working in more than one genre helps or hinders: "When Push Comes to Please."

It is the idea that where writing engages him in a relationship with and audience, and so pushes him to please others, his drawing only needs to please himself.

Whether pleasing others or only himself, finding time to concentrate on any creative work is a matter of choice. "I make space by starting to write for five or 10 minutes and then see what's there and work from that." And the routine of actually doing the work often fits around the other elements of his life. One of those major elements is his family. "In many ways they are the ground out of which writing comes. When dad needs time

to write – okay, daddy’s writing.” And like children whose fathers are electricians or plumbers or doctors, “My kids think dad’s a poet. That’s what dad does. There’s nothing unusual about it.” Sometimes Richard is able to create some time to write by making agreements with his family. “If we have a day where we want to go swimming, we make it in the afternoon. I do my thing and then we go swimming. There is always enough time to choose what’s most important. If you haven’t chosen to do it then it wasn’t most important. You might have wanted it to be, but that’s another issue.”

An integral part of making the choice to write is the process itself. “Writing is an act of sculpture. And like any sculptor does, the process begins by “going out in the field and finding a rock.” Once he has found that “rock”, the process truly begins. First come those five and 10 minute writing times, just to see if there is really something there to work on. Then comes what he calls the sculpting – 30 drafts to reach a final form of the poem. “I love doing it. It means I’m in a poem. I let my mind work on the poem even when I’m not working it on paper.” Something that Richard does to help him think is to write letters via e-mail to his wife, Lisa. She is his first editor and she sees repeated versions of the poem. “She is very feeling-oriented in terms of her critique and she’s very accurate. She’ll say, ‘That’s honest, this is not, that’s you, this is not.’”

Richard has been a member of critiquing groups in the past and has led other groups, including a current group. “I’m all in favour of them when they are right for the writer. Read the biography of any great poet, you’ll see they all had confidants whom they sent their work back and forth to and received commentary, and many longed for more of these than they had.” And while he doesn’t currently belong to a formally organized group to which he sends his work for comment, he does have a circle of friends who perform this role. But with or without the help of friends, Richard didn’t come easily to completing a large number of drafts. “I had to grow to 30 drafts – to have the patience for it. But more, to get the

pleasure of it. Wow, to be in a poem. There is something sacred about that first set of words. What you have to learn is that the last set of words is equally sacred and much more often than not, better."

For Richard, the process of learning has made writing both easier and harder, and also more fun. "I know more about how it works. I know more now about the incredibly small yet significant difference between the right word and the wrong word." And by working his way through so many drafts he has learned how to tell when a piece is finished: "When you just can't think of anything more to do with it." In the end, the whole process of writing is "more difficult but less frustrating."

Even after all the work that goes into his writing, Richard still gets rejections. "That is a significant moment to learn something. If somebody has said that this poem or this book isn't what we want or isn't good enough, then you have to learn how to learn from that." He admits that he neither likes getting rejected nor does he find it easy to take. "I would like to be the kind of person who has that very zen 'so that's how it is' and move on. I'm not there yet." Even so, he says, "I still have faith that I can learn enough from rejection to get better."

Despite the times his work is rejected, there are also times when it receives significant attention. Richard's work was short-listed for the Governor General's Award for poetry and won the W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Prize. "Are awards important? Yes, they are. Awards are a kind of language. They make a difference as to how your work will be looked at and treated. But rewards also represent conclusions: not just about literary merit but also about the personal taste of the people who give the award, blended with the attitude about things that are irrelevant to the literary work, blended with the agenda of the award givers, blended with so many other things it makes it very, very difficult for me to accept how important they are in the world. I would say that awards are important in the way that cars are important, they're there, they're big, they can hurt you or they can take you places."

As to whether or not awards play a role in his personal definition of success, Richard says, "Success is happiness. And all other questions fall completely into line from there. If I understood my life in such a way that I was happy with it, I would know that I was constantly learning from my rejections and from the awards that I won or didn't win. But more important are answers to the questions, did I love well today? did I work well today? did I make that poem the best that I thought it could possibly be, sacrificing my ego, my expression, my interest in it for the sake of making this thing the best object it could be? The same way you would raise a child, the same way you would be a friend – if I get to that point I'm successful."

The community at large may force the writer to decide whether or not he or she is happy and therefore successful and whether or not the awards have any bearing on that happiness, but the writer also has roles to play within that community at large. "Shelley said that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. I think he meant that we don't directly change very much. What we do is alert the conscience of our community. Look at the people in the world who are deeply motivated by poems and stories, by language: the Iraqi people, the Iranians, Israelis, Palestinians, the aboriginal peoples in the world. These are intensely poetic people. They care enormously about what is said of them. We think it doesn't matter. We teach our children to be immune to words – or pretend to be as a sign of strength. But the more we care about what is said of us, the more moral we are. We writers are the people who offer up what is said of us."

It may be the writer's job to offer up what is said about the community but "it is the public who will tell us what things are accepted or not accepted." And Richard is not convinced there is a unified position in the community when it comes to deciding this. When it comes to censorship, "I'm never against people giving advice about how to hear things, but I'm against people telling other people what they can and can't see or hear, read, view. I'm against power against art." He sees a clear distinction be-

tween somebody simply offering an opinion about a type of material and censorship. "I don't believe that when somebody says, 'I don't approve of your work,' they are advocating censorship. I don't approve of creepy horror crime stories. I don't think they are good for people. I wouldn't stop you from reading them but I wouldn't shy away from giving you my opinion either. Censorship is only applied to work whose power those in power fear."

Finally, where does Richard see himself in five or 10 years? "In the way that counts most in terms of what we've been talking about, after the most important hopes are fulfilled and I'm the happy father of young adults full of energy and promise, and the loving husband celebrating the 25th anniversary of his marriage to his first love and best friend, I hope I'll be a better writer than I am now – in both poetry and prose. I hope I've got the track record I have now as an editor – if not, then a better one – that has seen at least one book I've edited go to press every year. I hope I've helped others become better writers, too. I hope I'm more enlightened than I am now, and the things of the world that bother me or cloud my day won't any more, that I'll learn to accept what belongs to the world and take responsibility for the things that belong to me. I hope I'm still enjoying winter as much as I do now. And hockey. And comic books. And cards. And chess (actually, more than I do now). And basketball. And my dog. And the success and happiness of others.

Written April 2007

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Greg *Hollingshead*

Thirty years of teaching in the University of Alberta English Department and writing and publishing novels and short stories hasn't made the writing process much easier for Greg Hollingshead. "You put greater demands on yourself and try to keep those demands balanced with your abilities."

Greg grew up in Woodbridge, Ontario. Despite both parents having limited education there was a healthy respect for books at home. His mother occasionally wrote verse. His father was a local politician with a regular newspaper column. Greg remembers visiting the local library with his mother. As well as picture books, some of the favourites were *Robin Hood* and the *Hardy Boys*. He didn't become what he calls "a focused reader" until he became a writer himself.

He began writing poetry to handle overwhelming teenage emotions. He entertained his friends at parties by reciting what he called "talking blues." Without musical backing, he recited long poems that were "sort of like Dylan." His poetry was published in *T.O. Now*, an anthology edited by Dennis Lee.

Greg's first four novels were unsuccessful. Actually, the first novel was rejected thirty-four times. With the novel in the desk drawer, and his undergraduate and Masters degrees completed at the University of Toronto, Greg went to London, England to get his Ph.D. Upon his arrival back in Edmonton in 1975, he met short story writer and novelist Matt Cohen, the first Writer-in-Residence at the University of Alberta. Greg and Matt drove back together to Ontario for the summer holidays. He says, "As soon as I got out of Matt's truck I started to write short fiction and spent

Website

www.greghollingshead.com

Bibliography

Fiction

Famous Players, Coach House Press, 1982

Spin Dry, Mosaic Press, 1992

White Buick, Oolichan Books, 1992

The Roaring Girl, Somerville House, 1995; also published in the U.S., Britain, England, Germany and China.

The Healer, HarperFlamingoCollins, 1998; HarperFlamingo, London, 1999 also published in the U.S. and Britain.

Bedlam, paperback edition HarperCollins, 2004; also published in the U.S. edition, St. Martin's Press, 2004

Poetry

T O Now: Young Toronto Poets, anthology, House of Anansi Press, 1968.

Forthcoming

Spin Dry, HarperPerennial, 2006; new edition

the next twenty years writing it." Matt Cohen became a mentor and when he died in 1999, "It was a real blow -- like losing a brother, a father, and a teacher all at once."

Having had a mentor as well as having been one, he sees the value of mentorship. As a university professor and through his position as director of the writing programs at the Banff Centre, he says, "There are things that you can learn in a one-on-one encounter with a more experienced artist that you can't learn any other way."

More focused on novels now, Greg has tried his hand at writing screen plays and scripts for the stage. "I learned how tremendously, mathematically economical you have to be when writing for the stage. There is more room in a piece of fiction for a little bit of mis-shapeness in the dialogue that you can't get away with on the stage."

The ideas for the stories come from his experiences. "It's a matter of keeping your eyes open...." He adds, "The other part of this, and it's not to be under-estimated, is that a lot of things come up as you work -- other things are generated by the shape of the story you are telling."

Greg's writing day lasts about five and one half hours. He begins with a clean copy of the work done the day before and revises before moving ahead. Working this way, it isn't uncommon for some individual sentences to see sixty or seventy drafts. He says, "That is what you learn as a writer, that it's all about re-writing." He stops work after about four hours and prints off a clean copy of the work ready for the morning.

When he was teaching, he created writing time by writing short stories. "I could keep a hold of a short story, even though I was working a shorter period of time each day." The university has not been the only thing to demand his time. There are the writing programs at Banff. One of these he directs personally; the other two he oversees for direction. And there is his family too.

Awards

- Governor General's Award, 1995
- WGA, Howard O'Hagan Award for Short Fiction 1993, 1996
- WGA, Georges Bugnet Award for the Novel 1993, 1999
- The Rogers Trust Writers' Trust Fiction Prize Award, 1999
- Longlisted for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, 2005

Short-listed

- Giller Prize, 1998
- Commonwealth Prize, Canada and Caribbean Region, 1993, 2005
- City of Edmonton Book Prize, 2005
- Grant MacEwan Author's Award, 2005

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- The Writers Union of Canada
- PEN

The one person who sees Greg's work before it's sent to his agent is his wife Rosa. "She is a good reader, and ... as a psychologist, she has good insight into character and is concerned with the writing being psychologically true." He was a member of a critiquing group briefly, but the experience wasn't satisfying. In fact he says, "I would say the writers have to have a certain level of sophistication before going into a critiquing or workshop situation in order to distinguish the helpful from the unhelpful responses."

Despite receiving the Governor General's Award in 1995, Greg looks on the issue of awards with a bit of a jaundiced eye. He says, "One wants to believe that it's a gauge of quality. Most practically, it's a gauge of what your publisher's response will be either to this book or the next one." And awards certainly don't feature in any personal definition of success. "Success is having periods of ego inflated inappropriately," Greg says, "something that comes and goes - mostly goes." Ultimately, success is the reader who has connected with one of his books.

Perhaps one of the most important influences on his writing is the geography of his childhood. And although he says he thinks of the voice he hears and tries to recreate as the Canadian voice, it's arguably the voice of small-town southern Ontario. He says it's "the suburban/rural Canadian voice that is my cultural centre."

And it is this voice he uses to fulfill the role of the writer in the greater community. "I think the function of the writer is to speak personal truth. You don't get the human and universal until you get to the particulars and the particulars are always personal. It is those details that literary, and in my view, all worthwhile art is about. The more obviously political activities of writers are add-ons to that. They follow from that but art is not the politics as such."

Greg reacts to the issue of censorship by saying, "I can't support any form of political censorship." The only place he sees for censorship is when it

comes to protecting children from sexual exploitation. In this type of situation he says, "The idea of putting any kind of positive form to this really spooks me. Other than that, censorship should be fought."

Greg retired from the university at the end of June, 2006. He wants to continue working at the Banff Centre. "I am currently starting something fresh and new, going deeper, and not being happy with anything at all that doesn't please me. The trick is not to repeat myself or do anything that is too easy."

Written November 2006

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Faye Reineberg Holt

Faye Reineberg Holt, the middle girl of three sisters, grew up on a farm outside Stettler, Alberta. Faye went to a country school until Grade 10 and then attended the Stettler High School. She is Albertan to the core. It is no surprise that the geography that surrounds her has had a major influence on her writing. And she says that while becoming a writer hasn't changed any of her basic views or beliefs, "it has made me really aware of how many people work really hard for very little."

Her favourite children's books were the *Nancy Drew*, the *Hardy Boys*, the *Trixie Bell* and the *Anne of Green Gables* series. In high school she discovered Leon Uris and Tolstoy and Dickens. As an adult, all of Grant McEwan's books and many of Pierre Berton's are on that favourite list.

Attending the University of Alberta, Faye thought she would become a Social Worker. After a field trip to a provincial mental institution she switched her major to English. Upon graduating Faye returned to the university to obtain her teaching diploma.

Her interest in writing was tweaked in high school and again in university, however, she couldn't do anything about it until she was able to work part-time. She started sending out and publishing poetry. She took writing workshops, including one with Carol Shields and then a class with Bill Kinsella at the University of Calgary.

She enjoyed teaching but when her interest in history was reawakened she left it to work at the Glenbow Museum as an Education Officer. After that

Website

www.wordsandhistory.ca

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Alberta: A History in Photographs, Altitude Publishing, Banff, 1996

Help: Rescues & Disasters in Western Canada, Altitude, 1997

Out of the Flames: Fires and Fire Fighting on the Canadian Prairies, Fifth House, 1998

Threshing: The Early Years of Harvesting, Fifth House, 1999

Monarchs of the Fields, Fifth House, 1999

Settling in: First Homes on the Prairies, Fifth House Publishing, 1999

Homemade Fun: Games and Pastimes of the Early Prairie, Fifth House Imprint, Fitzhenry and Whiteside Publishing, 1999

Sharing Good Times, Detselig, 2000

Awed, Amused & Alarmed: Fairs, Rodeos & Regattas in Western Canada, Detselig, 2003

Prairie Twins: Alberta & Saskatchewan Photographic Memories 1905-2005, Detselig, 2004

Alberta: 100 Journeys, Canadian Motor Association, 2007 (Co-author)

Alberta: A History in Photographs, Altitude, 1996, reissued Heritage House, 2009 [NEW]

Poetry

Ice Fog, chapbook, Circle 5 Press, 1991

position changed, Faye taught adult students but finally left teaching school to concentrate on teaching writing workshops and her own work.

"My problem is having too many ideas and not enough time," says Faye. "There are a lot of fabulous stories out there that haven't gotten to the public." Today she is known primarily as a non-fiction writer; however, she comments, "I know when a passage in non-fiction is good that it has the influences of poetry and fiction..."

Her writing routine is simple - get to the desk by 8:30 a.m. and work until about 3:30 p.m. This routine was established when Faye's three step children were school age. She wove her writing in-between household tasks. Now that the children are all out of the house she still prefers to write in the morning leaving the weekends free.

She cautions that one has to be careful not to get into a critiquing group that is heavily influenced by one style of writing. She acknowledges that the feedback from groups can be helpful in revision. And for her, revision is one of the most important parts of writing. She says, "I can't imagine a writer that it isn't important to." Faye would revise endlessly if she could but she usually waits for the editor's response.

She has a very practical way of determining when a piece is finished. It is when she can't think of anything more to say about her subject. This may coincide with a deadline or it may be getting whatever needs saying down on paper because she is running out of time. She says, "I don't think it is ever done."

Faye has experienced rejection but she says, "I don't take it as a personal rejection." In fact, she often considers rejection to be the result of not having done her research into the markets well enough. What's more, she will often take the side of the publisher, realizing that it is the publisher who has to put out the money to get the writing into print.

Having established herself as a non-fiction writer, Faye says she thinks

Memberships

- The Writers' Union of Canada
- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Alexandra Writers Centre Society
- Society of Children's Book Authors and Illustrators
- Canadian Authors Association

that the writing has gotten easier than when she first started. At the same time, she doesn't feel that she has the freedom to write on a whim. "I may want to do something but choose not to do it because I know that it may be difficult to find a publisher. Being a writer - having it as my career - making a living at it - is more important than indulging a particular whim."

Regarding the importance of awards, she says, "...awards are not a driving force for me. It has always been more important for me to be writer." And awards play no part in her definition of success. In her terms, success means having your life focused on being a writer, not relying on a second job to support your writing career, having some respect for what you do, and getting books published and to the public.

As a storyteller, she sees the writer's role in the community as an advocate for literacy and writing of all kinds. "If we truly believe that all people are equal no matter what their education, then as writers we believe they are entitled to writing that is suitable for them. We can advocate this best by showing equal respect for all writers."

Fulfilling her community roles influences how she deals with the issue of censorship. She points to the creation of pornography using women, often young girls, and child pornography as examples where censorship plays a valid role. Where it becomes frustrating for her is when censorship of historical words is invoked on the basis of racial slurring. It is not that Faye wants to insult any person or group of people but, as she says, "it is very difficult to retell the true story and get the impact of the situation when one is not able to use the words. It should be the individual circumstance, the individual context or the context of the sentence rather than today's overall political sensitivity that says you can't use these words."

Faye's respect for other writers has determined the organizations to which she belongs. It is in these groups that Faye has found mentorship when she needed it. The groups have given her a "group of colleagues that understand the whole purpose of a writer."

Faye hopes to continue to write and publish poetry, fiction and non-fiction. Like most writers, her wish is that the writing be more financially rewarding.

Revised October 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Hazel Hutchins

Hazel began writing early in her life and sent material out while she was still in high school. When she finished high school she kept writing and kept sending short stories out to magazines, some of which were published. She said when we began the interview for this profile, "I'm supposed to say that my Aunt Mag [Alberta writer Marg Gilkes] taught me everything I know." Hazel listened well.

Hazel wrote short stories for adults while bringing home armloads of children's books to read to her children. A friend suggested that, as she was reading children's stories, she might want to write them. Her first reaction was, "I write to get away from all that." The next day she had an idea for a children's picture book so she sat down and wrote it. She submitted it to Annick Press and while they didn't accept that particular book they suggested that they liked her style and asked if she could come up with a story for children seven to 10 years of age. "My motto is, if a door opens a crack, jump in with both feet."

If you count the years when she was writing for adults before she began to write for children, Hazel has been juggling a family and a writing career for about 23 years.

In order to create the time to write, Hazel followed her own simple rules: 1) As soon as the baby is asleep, you don't do anything but write. 2) Writing goes ahead of all those things you want to do. 3) Bore yourself to death. Don't go out for coffee with your friends. Just stay in and you'll be so damn bored you'll have to write. In addition to the above rules, to get her writing done

Website

www.telusplanet.net/public/hjhutch/home.html

Bibliography

Children and Young Adult

Ages 13-15

After, Smith, Bonappétit & Son, 2008 [NEW]

Ages 8 - 12

Casey Webber, The Great, Annick Press, 1988

A Cat of Artimus Pride, Annick Press, 1991

The Best of Arlie Zack, Annick Press, 1993

Within a Painted Past, Annick Press, 1994

The Prince of Tarn, Annick Press, 1997

The Three and Many Wishes of Jason Reid, Annick Press, reissued 2000

TJ and the Cats, Orca, 2002

TJ and the Haunted House, Orca, 2003

TJ and the Rockets, Orca, 2004

Sarah and the Magic Science Project, Annick, 2005

TJ and the Sports Fanatic, Orca, 2006

Anastasia Morningstar and the Crystal Butterfly, Annick Press

TJ and the Quiz Kids, Orca Publishing, 2007

Ages 6 - 8

Shoot for the Moon, Robyn, Formac Publishing, 1997

Robyn's Want Ad, Formac Publishing, 1998

Robyn Looks for Bears, Formac Publishing, 2000

Robyn's Best Idea, Formac Publishing, 2001

Robyn's Art Attack, Formac, 2002

Robyn Makes the News, Formac, 2003

Skate, Robyn, Skate!, Formac, 2004

Robyn's Party -in-the-Park, Formac, 2005

when her children were small, she wrote for an hour during Sesame Street. Then she made a deal with one child that if she played with him for an hour, he would give her time to write. She wrote after her husband came home from work, huddled in her unheated basement, wrapped up in a blanket. Now, her children older, she works in the morning for at least two hours. That's not to say she won't work for eight hours if she can get it. Hazel doesn't see herself as a driven writer, but "It is what I do."

She has published 20 picture books, eight novels for children ages six to eight, 11 novels for children ages eight to 12. A picture book, a first novel and a junior novel were all released in 2002. Her books are published in Canada, the U.S., Great Britain, Germany and South Korea not to mention the short stories for adult readers published in various magazines.

The process of sending out and getting material accepted or rejected has not become routine for Hazel. She still gets "massively excited" when her work is accepted and "I get sick to my stomach" when rejected. Hazel does not work with an agent. She does all the work of sending out manuscripts on her own. "It is good, in that I know where the stories are. However, it is terribly time consuming." One thing she says is, "If the publisher wants rewrites, you've got to send it back better than they expect it."

And in the process of sending manuscripts out and doing the necessary rewrites, the concern over censorship rarely raises its head. "I think that everybody has certain moral standards which are pretty basic regarding hurting other people. Certain things are just totally wrong in terms of being harmful to every human being." Self-censorship comes into play too. "It counts double when you are writing for kids because I wouldn't write something that I wouldn't want my own children to read."

In her 23-year career she has never belonged to a critiquing group. She feels strongly that showing your work to others before sending it to a publisher is not the most productive thing one can do. "Tell people not to do it because so seldom do you run into anybody who actually has any

Robyn's Monster Play, Formac, 2008 [NEW]

Picture Books

Leanna Builds a Genie Trap, Annick Press, 1986

Ben's Snow Song, Annick Press, 1987

Norman's Snowball, Annick Press, 1989

Nicholas at the Library, Annick Press, 1990

Katie's Babbling Brother, Annick Press, 1991

And You Can Be the Cat, Annick Press, 1992

The Catfish Palace, Annick, 1993

Believing Sophie, Albert Whitman and Co., 1995

Tess, Annick Press, 1995

Yancy and Bear, Annick Press, 1996

It's Raining, Yancy and Bear, Annick Press, 1998

One Duck, Annick Press, 1999

The Wide World of Suzie Mallard, Ducks Unlimited, 2000

Two So Small, Annick Press, 2000

One Dark Night, Viking, 2001

I'd Know You Anywhere, Annick, 2002

The Sidewalk Rescue, Annick, 2004

Beneath the Briodge, Annick, 2004

A Second is a Hiccup, Scholastic, 2004

The List, Annick, 2007

Mattland, Annick, 2008 [NEW]

Together, Annick, 2009 [NEW]

expertise." The decision as to when a story is done is simply "when I can't make it any better."

To a certain extent getting published is success. Success is also the awards, which are important for indicating that the work has value in a literary sense. They validate what she is doing. The real success, however, is making enough money from her writing that she doesn't have to find a "real" job. In the past she's worked as a front desk clerk, a cabin girl, and a cashier.

Despite all of the books and awards, being a writer in a more rural part of the province might be lonely if it were not for writers' organizations. Writers' organizations "are great for contacts. I feel connected to the community without having to live in a large urban centre."

While being connected to the writing community is important, so is being part of the greater community in which she lives. The role of the writer in the larger community is one of "reflecting people back on themselves, letting them know that there are shared emotions, shared humanities."

The geography of the place that she lives shapes her writing only from the point of view that it shapes many of her own experiences. "Geography has formed many of my experiences and finds its way into my stories because I write what I know." The geography doesn't inspire the story; however, "I'm always looking for some tiny, telling little human incident rather than sitting around and gazing up at the mountains."

Just a couple of suggestions for beginning writers. "If someone wants to write a kids' book, come at it from the point of view of the love of language and wanting to tell a good story. Not from simply being around kids, reading kids books and thinking you can write a kids' book. Hazel also suggests that if one does begin writing for children, it might be a bit easier to get the work read by a publisher if it is for children who are past the picture book stage.

Awards

- R. Ross Annett Award, Writers guild of Alberta, for Children's Literature (three times) [NEW]
- Storytelling World Award
- White Raven International Youth Library Selections Award
- Parenting Magazine Reading Magic Awards List
- The Canadian Children's Book Centre "Our Choice" List
- Shining Willow Young Readers Choice Award
- Marilyn Baillie Picture Book Award 2009 [NEW]

Short-listed

- Mr. Christie Book Award (twice)
- Governor General's Award for Children's Literature
- Norma Fleck Non-Fiction Honour Book
- Silver Birch, Blue Spruce, Red Cedar, Red Maple, Hackmatack and Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Awards (various titles)

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers Union of Canada
- CANSCAIP (Canadian Society of Authors, Illustrators and Performers)
- Canadian Children's Book Centre
- Young Alberta Book Society

Hazel's plan for the future? "Just to keeping publishing. I hope to be able to do two or three books a year."

Revised January 2010

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.ssf.net/people/asinclair/marie.html

Marie Jakober

Marie Jakober has lived a “writer’s life,” working as a turndown maid, a receptionist, a teacher, in a bakery, a flower shop, and for the last 25 years, in the library at the University of Calgary, all to support her habit of writing. “All I ever wanted to do was write.”

Marie grew up on a homestead in the Peace River country. “We were really on the frontier.” Not particularly interested in farming and often lonely, she can’t remember a time when stories were not important to her. “Even before I could write, I would make up stories and tell them to anybody who would listen.”

Marie’s first eight years of school were done by correspondence. She lived away from home in boarding situations in order to complete her high school. Books were a precious commodity. A year-long illness as a youngster turned out to have a positive side to it. While in hospital Marie was told about the University of Alberta Extension Library. Now she could send in a list of books and the library would send them two at a time and pay the postage both ways! It was during this time that she became interested in the American Civil War. “It must have been a novel that got me hooked.” Once hooked, she discovered the histories and biographies on that war. While her parents supported her reading, their eyebrows were slightly raised at the idea that their daughter was so interested in things military. Her interest in this period of history has continued to this day.

While she was still studying by correspondence she learned of the Shankar’s Weekly International Children’s Competition in New Delhi, India for

Bibliography

Fiction

The Mind Gods, Macmillan, 1976

Sandinista, New Star Books, 1985

A People in Arms, New Star Books, 1987

The Black Chalice, Edge Science Fiction & Fantasy Publishing, 2000

Only Call Us Faithful, Forge Books, 2002

Even the Stones, Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2004

Sons of Liberty, Forge Books, 2005

Halifax Connection, Random House, Canada, 2007

[NEW]

writers under the age of 16. As many young people do, she was writing poetry. She submitted her work and was rewarded with publication and a small prize. She submitted work again a second year and won the gold medal -- no mean feat as there were 26,000 entries from 52 countries! This resulted in letters of congratulations from all over Canada, a letter from Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, and a scholarship for education awarded to her by the Alberta Government. That scholarship guaranteed that Marie could have her University education. She graduated with distinction from Carleton University in Ottawa.

Although she has published poetry and short stories, Marie is primarily a novelist. "The stories that really attract me don't want to get any smaller, nor much bigger." Her writing routine starts right after breakfast. She does not believe in setting herself a word or page quota. On a good day of writing she will work for about five hours. She revises as she goes and does a major revision upon completing the draft. Her most important tip to writers - when researching, keep records of what you found and where you found it.

Marie's first novel was a finalist in the Search-for-a-New-Alberta-Novelist Competition sponsored by Alberta Culture in 1974. After the publication of that novel, she was unsure of whether she would continue writing. On holiday in Holland in the late 1970s she attended a rally which was focusing attention on Nicaragua. When she got home there was more in the daily news about that country's struggles. A novel began to form in her mind. She met another writer, Sarah Murphy, and attended a rally in Calgary. She decided to travel to Nicaragua on her own in 1982. She spent a month travelling around the country and came home to write a second novel. She convinced Sarah to join her in a return trip to that country. Sarah, speaking fluent Spanish, acted as a translator. They spent a month in the country again and as a result Marie wrote a second novel based on the turmoil in Nicaragua.

Since 1987 Marie has continued to write, producing several Speculative

Awards

- Georges Bugnet Award for Novel, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1985 -- Sandinista
- Michael Shaara Award for Excellence in Civil War Fiction, The United States Civil War Centre, 2003 -- Only Call Us Faithful
- Georges Bugnet Award for Novel, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2006 -- Sons of Liberty

Short-listed

- Sunburst Award, Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy, 2000
- Georges Bugnet Award for Novel, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2002
- Georges Bugnet Award for Novel, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2005

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- SF Canada

Fiction novels and a triptych of novels based on the American Civil War all of which have garnered much attention.

While Marie finds the awards flattering, she has no illusions when it comes to whether or not they have any part in her definition of success. Her idea of real success is getting books out to readers.

When considering the question of whether writing is easier or harder now than it was when she started, she says, "It depends on what you measure. I probably produced more work in a day twenty years ago than I do now, but it is easier now to know what I want and to shape it. Having published some books makes it easier as you have more confidence that you can do it. However, your standards for yourself go up and therefore it is probably harder."

She leaves beginning writers with a couple of things to think about. She says, "The writer's life is one in which you may feel like an idiot when you are struggling to get established. You need a certain kind of arrogance [to survive]. Not mean-spirited but an 'I want to do this and phooey to the world' attitude. Believe in yourself."

She sees her role as a writer in the greater community as one of a "shaker-upper" – somebody who asks the harder questions about the political issues, institutions and myths of the day and the things that have shaped them. "We are an accumulation of what we are exposed to in culture and other things too. I know I was shaped by the questions that were asked in books I read and the questions that were not asked. We learn far more from our culture than we give it credit."

A question that is being asked in North American society and which influences the books that are available for reading, is the one regarding censorship. Marie feels that censorship is valid in two instances; when dealing with military information during a war and when controlling hate literature. "There is a great deal of material out there that is objectionable

for a variety of reasons, but I don't think censorship is the way to deal with it. I think it is much more effective to confront it, talk about it publicly, discuss what is wrong with it and why."

Marie belongs to two writers' organizations. She sees the roles for both these organizations as being one of advocacy. However, she also finds the List-serve for SF Canada an invaluable place for the exchange of information.

Her future is to continue doing what she has been all along -- writing novels based on the things that interest her. "I will find a new subject area in which to work. I think I've done all I want to do with the Civil War."

Revised October 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Myrna Kostash

"It's really interesting," says Myrna Kostash, "I was raised with the typical Canadian multi-cultural myth, that people suffered and were oppressed in the Old Country. They were barely literate men and women in sheepskin coats, living by the sweat of their brow, etc., etc. Imagine my surprise when on my second visit to Ukraine, in 1988, when one could go into the villages more freely, I discovered in my paternal family's village the grave of a Kostash who had written a book. My first reaction was, 'What! I'm not the first one?'" As Myrna dug deeper into her family background she discovered that this distant relative, who had written his memoir, had been a school teacher and had befriended an important writer who was the doctor in the village.

Myrna, born in Edmonton, lived her early life in the Delton district of that city. In the early 1950s the district was mainly a community of working class eastern Europeans like her maternal grandparents, who had come from Ukraine. But, like that long-forgotten relative, Myrna's parents were teachers. Teachers' salaries were low in the 1950s but as they began to rise her parents moved the family out of the district. Nevertheless, the pull towards the community was and still is a strong one. "My Baba and some of my cousins lived in that neighbourhood so we were constantly going back there. I'm happy to say that I'm again involved with the neighbourhood. I am a volunteer barista (an employee of a specialty coffee shop) in the Community Arts Café, the Carrot, on 118th Avenue, which is part of the revitalization to make it arts friendly."

All her early education was in Edmonton. She went to Delton elementary school across the street from her house. She attended and graduated

Bibliography

Non-fiction

All of Baba's Children, Hurtig, 1977, reissued NeWest Press 1987, 1992

Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada, Lorimer, 1980

No Kidding: Inside the World of Teenage Girls, McClelland & Stewart, 1987

Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe, Douglas & McIntyre, 1993

The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir, NeWest Press, 1998

The Next Canada: In Search of the Future Nation, McClelland & Stewart, 2000

Ukleti Mladozenja, Nis, Serbia, SKC, 2004 [translation of *The Doomed Bridegroom* by Vesba Lopicic & Aleksandar Blagojevic]

Reading the River: A Traveller's Companion to the North Saskatchewan, Coteau Books, 2005

The Frog Lake Reader, NeWest Press, 2009

Forthcoming

Prodigal Daughter: A Journey to Byzantium, University of Alberta Press, 2010

Drama

No Kidding, Vancouver Green Thumb, 1982

Reunion, CBC Saturday Stereo Theatre, 1984

After the Fall: The Erotic Life of the Left, Catalyst "Write on the Edge" cabaret, 1988

The Collaborators, CBC Speaking Volumes, 1989

File #3168, Catalyst, 1993

from Ross Shepherd High, then to the University of Alberta, where she graduated with a BA in Russian Language and Literature with a minor in French. She left Edmonton to attend graduate school at the University of Washington, majoring in Russian and Soviet studies, and finished her Masters in this field at the University of Toronto in 1969.

Myrna started writing early in her life and had lots of support for what she was doing. "I love to tell this story because it shows just how much of a nonfiction writer I am. I wrote my first book when I was in grade four. My father typed it up and my teacher made a nice binding for it, green paper and pink ribbon." Myrna had been reading *The Black Stallion* series, about a black horse and a boy and their friendship. "So, I wrote *The White Stallion Revolts* and I put a girl in it. My sister smelled a rat, and said, 'You didn't make that up. I know where you got that.' I said, 'I did too, it has a white horse and a girl in it!' Looking back on it I realize I was incapable of inventing a whole other world. I was inspired by the world that I was in contact with. That was my first experience."

In high school Myrna took an advanced English course that included creative writing. The summer before, her first boyfriend had drowned. "I wrote about that. I don't have the piece any more but I remember the teacher saying, 'This is real writing. This isn't just an account or a report, it has real flourish.'"

Still in high school, she took a writing course from teacher Elsie Park Gowan, a well-known writer and playwright. "I wrote a beatnik poem and was rather proud of it. She made fun of it in front of the class. That's why I don't write poetry. I learned my lesson."

But she had the support of her parents when she decided to pursue writing. "My mother read books to us. I remember being drawn in a sled over the snow to the bookmobile to pick out books. We didn't have a television so it was a very bookish household. We were certainly able to read them ourselves but loved being read to." And then there came the time when,

Radio Documentary

Within the Copper Mountain, CBC Ideas, 1997

History 605, CBC Ideas, 1998

The Masked Man in Warsaw, CBC Ideas, 1999

Edith Stein: Whose Saint Was She?, CBC Ideas, 2000

Pursuing Demetrius, CBC Ideas, 2001

Voices from Frog Lake, CBC Ideas, 2005

Six Things You Need to Know About Byzantium, CBC Ideas, 2007

Film

Teach Me to Dance, National Film Board, 1978

Where is Rosa, University of Alberta Drama Lab, 1985
(TV drama)

entering Ross Shep high school, her father bought her a leather-bound note book and inscribed in it, "To Myrna, may you be the Samuel Pepys of your generation." "I think of that now as a prescient nod to nonfiction." And if there was any doubt left, it was removed when, after getting her Masters degree, Myrna went to Europe travelling on the continent and then England, where she began living the life of a writer. Her father sent her \$100 a month to help with her living expenses so that she didn't have to work full-time. She worked in a pub during the evenings and wrote during the day.

While she was living in Britain she was writing and sending out short stories to magazines. "They were all rejected for very good reasons that I see now. It was absolutely not my genre." That may have been her ultimate conclusion but it didn't come easily. She was living close to Elm Cottage in Buckinghamshire, the home of Margaret Laurence. Friends of Myrna's were baby-sitting Margaret's two children. Naturally, Myrna hung out with her friends at Margaret's place. At one point Myrna sent Margaret some short stories for her comment. "She didn't completely discourage me but she said something like 'keep on, perhaps you'll find your voice.' When my first book, *All of Baba's Children*, came out, which was a complete work of nonfiction, she wrote me a note to say 'congratulations, you've found your genre.'"

But the move away from writing fiction came about almost by accident. Myrna was watching television with her friends at Margaret's home. The program was about the trial of the Chicago Seven, protesters who had been arrested during the riots in Chicago at the time of the Democratic Convention in 1968. "We were all Canadians watching a British show about an American event. I was very struck by that. Up until that point I had lived this kind of transnational hippy life of the 1960s. It never occurred to me that I hadn't actually participated in any of the mayhem in the U.S. It struck me with such force that I ran out of the room to the sitting room upstairs and wrote out this fast and furious personal essay."

Awards

- Silver Citation, National Magazine Award, 1985
- Wilfred Eggleston Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1988
- Alberta Achievement Award, Alberta Government, 1988
- Best Non-fiction Award, Alberta Culture, 1988
- Wilfred Eggleston Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1994
- Best Non-Fiction Award, Alberta Culture, 1994
- Excellence in Artistry Award, Alberta Council of Ukrainian Arts, 2001
- Honorary Life Member, Canadian Conference of the Arts, 2002
- Queen's Jubilee Award, 2002
- The Alberta Centennial Medal, Alberta Government, 2005
- Salute to Excellence Citation Award, City of Edmonton, 2006
- Saskatchewan Book Awards, Saskatchewan Writers Guild, 2006
- Golden Pen Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2008
- Edmonton Cultural Hall of Fame, 2009

Short-listed

- Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing, Writer's Trust of Canada, 2001

Myrna says that what she wrote that evening she has since come to recognize as her debut in the "new journalism." "By that I mean I was writing a report, but with a very, very strong point of view, mine. It wasn't 'objective' at all. The point I was making was about Canadians in the 1960s. I was quite pleased with it. But what to do with it?" She sent it first to *Maclean's* which was a monthly magazine at the time. They rejected it. Then she tried a magazine she had never heard of before: *Saturday Night*. They took it. And what's more they paid for it. "Because I was still living in Europe, I kept writing and sending stuff about my experiences hitchhiking in Yugoslavia and motorcycling in Spain. All of it was highly coloured and opinionated, what I called 'journalism with a great big attitude,' and what one of my friends calls 'full tilt boogie.'" But regardless of the label, *Saturday Night* kept publishing her work.

When Myrna returned to Toronto, she was under the impression that, because of the success she had had with *Saturday Night*, she could get a job writing. She learned the definition of "freelance" the hard way. She sought out Robert Fulford, then editor of *Saturday Night*. He agreed to meet with her but when she asked him if he had any work for her, to her surprise his response was to ask if she had any ideas to pitch to him. "That was my rude awakening to what turned out to be the rest of my life."

Once she understood that as a writer she was supposed to be writing material and then trying to sell it to magazines, as opposed to working as an employee of a magazine, she began enjoying considerable success. Canada was in the middle of the feminist movement. She contacted Doris Anderson, then editor of *Chatelaine*, who had seen Myrna's work, as had the editor of *Miss Chatelaine*, who gave her an outlet for her voice. This led to work with other magazines such as *The Weekend* and *The Canadian* and *TV Guide*. By the time she had been back in Canada for three years, she was writing a column on men's and women's relationships for *Maclean's* magazine. "Now I see it as the Golden Age of magazine writing. You could make a living by writing for them in a kind of rotation."

Memberships

- Board of the Parkland Institute, University of Alberta
- Canada Yugoslavia Literary Association (defunct), founding member
- Creative Nonfiction Collective, founding member
- PEN
- The Periodical Writers' Association of Canada, founding member
- The Saskatchewan Writers' Guild
- The Writers Guild of Alberta, founding member
- The Writers' Union of Canada
- The Carrot Café (volunteer)

For a nonfiction writer, finding ideas to write about isn't really that difficult. "You depend on getting excited or curious about something that is in your vicinity or in the world around you. You don't have to generate it within your own imagination. You need be merely curious. I had been highly politicized during the 1960s. I had all this experience of hitchhiking across Europe. And I had had all that sex, drugs and rock and roll. There was no end of topics." As well as books and magazine articles, Myrna wrote book reviews, and profiles of socially interesting people such as dancer Karen Kane and singer Rita McNeil. "I suppose it is a combination of opportunity and curiosity. Everybody is interested in something. You have to be aware of the kinds of debates that are going on, the controversies that are going on around you. Pick something and find the hook. That is where the writer sinks or swims. You have to come up with the 'why should I tell the rest of the world.'"

Getting those ideas on paper means having some kind of discipline. Myrna has her own routine. "When I'm starting a project like a book, I write every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Tuesdays and Thursdays are for the rest of my life. If I have a designated writing day then I'm not worried about when am I going to do the laundry. And when I'm ironing I'm not thinking I should be writing because I know I'll do the writing tomorrow." She has another rule about working: her time between getting up until about 10 o'clock in the morning is spent reading the magazines to which she subscribes and drinking her morning tea. "I'm not one of those writers who says I must write 1,000 words a day. I write the words I have to write or need to write. There are days when I come up dry. There's no use fighting it. If you're blanking or blocking or tired or whatever, you might as well walk away from it. You're not going to get any good work done."

There may be times when the writing won't come but Myrna has little use for the term "writer's block." "I think it is something much more serious and may be connected to something neurotic. Most of us are experiencing something much less drastic, like lack of inspiration for that particular

day. You have to learn to trust your subconscious to do its work. I read somewhere that writer's block is a sign to us that we have a writing problem. You're not blocked. You're not having a nervous breakdown. You're having a writing problem. That's why I think it is a good idea just to walk away from it. Distract yourself for a while and then come back to it. Most times it will take care of itself."

When her routine is working and the writing is getting done, she doesn't stop to revise until she has the whole work completed. "I find fiction writers are very odd people. They will obsessively write and rewrite the first chapter. I don't understand that because how do you know what you need until you've seen the whole thing." Myrna doesn't use a critiquing group to help with the editing but relies rather on the magazine or book editors to help her polish the work. "I'm not a first draft writer but by the third draft I usually have it nailed." She learned that technique while working with Robert Fulford when he was the editor at *Saturday Night*. "He would always send the piece back. I did a profile of Murray McLaughlin. Fulford sent me on the road with the band when they were touring Alberta. That was exciting. I wrote this funky journalism thing and Fulford sent it back with things scatched out, asking 'what does this mean,' and saying 'can't follow you here.' At first I got miffed. But I learned very, very quickly to take that sort of thing seriously. If you're in the hands of a good editor, you know you're going to do a better job. There are stupid editors but I never felt I had one. They wanted the same thing that I did: to make this the best piece of writing and to get the point across to their readers." Myrna acknowledges that there may be times when a struggle occurs between the writer and the editor. It happened to her once where she finally demanded that her name be taken off the article because the editor insisted on making changes to her piece. "The struggle for the writer is, do you knuckle under, if you want the glory, see your name in print, get paid for the work? Or do you stand up for your principles and refuse to make the changes? And chance getting rejected or never getting another assignment or not getting paid for it." Fortunately, by the time that

Myrna was developing her career, there was a general practice that publishers paid a “kill fee” if the work was not going to be published. “You walked away with some dignity and some money, if not all.”

Research is a corollary to the writing stage of a project. Inevitably, the line between the time spent researching and the time spent actually writing begins to blur. “Your own consciousness tells you that you are just avoiding the writing. Some people never get past the research and maybe that is what they were meant to be, readers, editors, and researchers. It is quite seductive. There is always that one more book you need for your bibliography.”

Myrna got really caught up in the research for her forthcoming book on Saint Demetrius, a martyr of the early church in the eastern Mediterranean region: “The world of the Roman Empire in the east, Egypt and the Holy Land, Constantinople and Greece -- that is, Byzantium. That is where the early Christian church was established. I always wanted to write about Byzantium and about that period in history. I knew that with all my books, starting with *All of Baba's Children*, that I was going back progressively to a deeper layer of identity. That is what I was doing in terms of my own cultural DNA. This project is huge. We're talking 1000 years of history: history of the early church, the Balkans, war, crusades and empires. I dedicated myself to an education in Byzantium for a couple of years.”

The project on Saint Demetrius has taken a total of 10 years of research and writing from start to finish. “My early books would take two years: one year of interviews and working in secondary sources and archives and the second year for writing. But once you get more complicated, you get more material, you get more themes, you've got deeper thoughts about things because you are older. But the factor here that really takes the time is that you have to know what this is all about. That's why you spend so much time writing so many drafts because the first draft doesn't get you anywhere near what you are really trying to do. You don't know yourself until you've lived with it.” Myrna approached her then-publisher

with the idea for this book after she had been working on it for two years. The publisher rejected it. "The only way I could convince a publisher was when I finally understood the book. I didn't know that in the first year and a half. I just thought I was writing an interesting travelogue. We write to find out what we think and feel. I know I have to write the book that I dreamed of then after that worry about the audience."

While she was writing magazine articles, Myrna almost always relied on the editor to help her put the finishing polish on the work. But it was a different case with her books when she discovered that most publishers of nonfiction do not pay much editorial attention, by which she means literary attention. "I was really lucky with the first four or five books, in that I had a contract before I wrote the book. When you write nonfiction you get a book on the basis of what it's about, then you go out and do it. It is edited for content but rarely for style. Then, when you start doing more creative nonfiction where it gets more complex formally and more personal, it's much harder to describe the book before you've done some of it. And you really do need an editor." But the publishing world keeps changing and many publishers, especially the smaller ones, don't employ a full-time editorial staff. Often, "you have to get your own editor and pay for him or her, which is what happened with my new book about Byzantium. In fact, I had two editors at different points because it was taking such a long time. I definitely benefited from that."

While Myrna has worked with editors, whether employed by the publisher or freelance, she has never belonged to a critiquing group. "I never felt the need to be part of a circle of critique. I just got on with it." And there is the point that, "When I began doing new journalism and creative nonfiction in the 1970s, there wasn't anybody in Edmonton who was doing quite the same thing." Having done a lot of teaching she has asked her students how they feel about belonging to a group. For the most part, her students have told her that they get a lot out of it. "Being able to go somewhere that isn't your family who will be encouraging is a good thing. But

you have to be careful: a lot of groups are just nicey nicey. That's why we have writers-in-residence so that you can get a more critical perspective. When I started writing my books, I was already an established magazine writer. I had enough confidence to put myself out there. If I hadn't been a published writer it might have been really helpful to be in a group."

That is not to say that Myrna hasn't had mentors in her life. "My first and probably most important one was Bob Fulford when he was editor of *Saturday Night* magazine. He published my first professional appearance in 1971 and he kept accepting my work. As I said, I was in the heyday of the 'new journalism' and, although I don't think he was temperamentally a 'new journalist' himself, he gave me every encouragement – but only after rewrites. In terms of book publishing I would say Douglas Gibson, who I first knew when he worked at Macmillan. He always showed an interest in me even when I was working on a book for another publisher. Finally, Alberto Manguel, when he was director of the MacLean-Hunter Literary Journalism program at the Banff Centre together with the late Barbara Moon who was one of the editors, gave me enormous encouragement as a participant just as I was really spreading my wings with creative nonfiction."

There is excitement in Myrna's voice as she returns to the theme of her new book about Byzantium. There is an excitement towards her writing which has changed as her writing has changed. "I'm finding after 30 years that I'm not very interested in magazine feature writing the way I used to be. I'm much more interested in the personal essay, writing reflectively. And as far as my books go, I'm finally tired of travelling a lot in order to do them. My idea of a perfect writing experience is to go to the library – which is where I started out, at the bookmobile! – and find interesting things and put them in my notebook and see what I can make of them when I'm back sitting in my own room."

But the writing has gotten harder. "I've discovered with my genre that once you are into a creative nonfiction you really have to struggle for

structure. It doesn't have an obvious plot. You really have to struggle with the material to find out what it's all about and how to order it. It's deeply interesting but, oh boy, it's not a snap the way it used to be."

The enjoyment of writing may be there still, but whether or not she is a successful writer isn't something she thinks about until she looks back over the years she has spent writing. "When you're in the middle of it you are thinking, am I going to be able to sell this book, who cares, how am I going to pay my taxes? When you look back, you say gosh I've been able to publish all my books, I've got name recognition, I've supported myself as a writer, I've enjoyed the company of other writers and people in the arts community in general, I know that among Ukrainian Canadians I'm well respected, and I find myself being written about." However, awards certainly do not figure prominently in her self-definition of success. She has received many honours over the years and she is pleased to have received them. "It might be nice to get a Governor-General's award for one of my books, maybe the next one, but we'll see."

She used to think, as a straightforward nonfiction writer, that the role she played in the community at large was that of an activist. "Especially when society around me was so turbulent. When there was so much turmoil in society around us, it was hard not to respond to it. You see yourself as having something to contribute, as a writer, to the women's movement or the environmental movement or later western regionalism or multiculturalism. But society became much more conservative with the Mulroney government and Thatcherism and Reaganism, and the 1960s and 1970s seemed to go underground. That coincided with my becoming more interested in what I was doing in a more literary way and my sense of community shifted from that political-social one to the literary one. That's when I became a founding member of the Writers Guild of Alberta, a founding member of the Periodical Writers Association of Canada and worked on committees within the Writers' Union of Canada before being elected Chair in 1993."

There was a time when as an “activist” Myrna supported the idea of censorship of pornography. “I changed my position radically exactly on that question when I realized that the kind of imagery that is indeed deeply injurious to women and girls is never going to be censored because it is in the culture. It’s in the magazines, in advertising, in commercials, in the way women are represented in mainstream television, in song lyrics. What are you going to do? Ban it all? You can’t. I realized you give a lot of power over to the state asking them to censor because they might not censor the stuff you need them to censor. I think there are enough regulations in our civil law that we should not desire the intervention of the government into cultural expression.”

There is no chance of Myrna stopping her writing. She’s been writing a string of personal essays, has started work on a play and is researching a new book. “I’m still curious about so many things. I want to keep writing because that’s how I find out how I really feel about all of it.”

Written August 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Robert Kroetsch

The man with striking white hair who is completely involved in a conversation across the room is Robert Kroetsch. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada. He has won the Governor General's Award for his fiction and been short-listed for the same award for his poetry. He has been publishing books since 1965. If one didn't know this man had been awarded these accolades, there is nothing about Robert Kroetsch's attitude or behaviour that would give it away.

Ask anybody who knows the work of Robert Kroetsch how they would identify him and the answer almost invariably comes back, "He is an Alberta writer." The author describes himself the same way -- this despite the fact that he hasn't lived in the province for any length of time since he was a young man.

Robert grew up in the farming community of Heisler, Alberta. He was a student during the second World War. Because of the shortage of teachers during the war, after completing Grade 11 in his home town, he was sent to finish his high school in Red Deer. Once he finished he went to the University of Alberta to obtain a BA with a major in English. His parents worked hard to ensure that their son had the opportunity to go to university. "My parents were supportive but they were farmers. They told me I had to go to university but they had no idea what a university was. When I came home with a degree in English they were pretty mystified."

Robert wrote stories from the time he was a small child but he never gave any serious thought to the possibility that he might actually write pro-

Bibliography

Poetry

The Ledger, Applegarth Follies, 1975

Stone Hammer Poems, Oolichan Books, 1976, 1983

The Sad Phoenician, Coach House Press, 1979

Field Notes, General Publishing, 1981

Excerpts from the Real World, Oolichan Books, 1981

Advice to My Friends, Stoddart, 1985

Seed Catalogue, Turnstone Press, 1986

Completed Field Notes, McClelland & Stewart, 1989

The Hornbooks of Rita K, University of Alberta Press, 2001

The Snowbird Poems, University of Alberta Press, 2004

Fiction

But We Are Exiles, MacMillan, 1965

The Studhorseman, University of Alberta Press, 1969, 2004

Gone Indian, Stoddart, 1973, 1999

Badlands, Stoddart, 1975, 1999

What the Crow Said, University of Alberta Press, 1978

Sundogs, Coteau, 1980

Alibi, Stoddart, 1983

The Puppeteer, 1992

The Man from the Creeks, Random House of Canada, 1998

The Words of My Roaring, University of Alberta Press, 2000

fessionally. That is, not until his English teacher, Mrs. Aylesworth, noted Robert's interest in the subject and asked him if he had ever considered becoming a writer. He says, "After that it was like I had a vision. I was 17 and had been writing since I was a kid. I thought that was a pretty normal thing to do. I thought everybody did that. Then I found out it was really abnormal." In 1947 he went to the Banff School of Fine Arts where he had a professor who told him that he thought he had talent. Before he could get puffed up about it, however, the professor shocked him by saying, "Give it 10 years."

After graduating from the University of Alberta, Robert got his first job as a labourer in Fort Smith. "I went up there because I thought I would write a novel about that part of the country." Many years later he actually wrote that novel. He worked in the North for six years, moving from Fort Smith to the Mackenzie River area, then to Churchill on Hudson's Bay. He was enjoying both the North country and the labouring work. The labour work didn't last. It turned out that he was the only one in the camps that could read and write. From then on, while he worked the camps he was pushing a pencil.

During the Korean War, Robert worked for the American airforce in Labrador, where he was in charge of the education and information programs. He found himself advising American airmen on what courses of study to follow after they had finished their tours of service. "I was advising and I thought this sounds like a good idea, this going to school. When I quit there I went to graduate school." He attended Middlebury College in Vermont and when he was finished he had a MA. From there he went to the University of Iowa, one of the few in the United States that had a Creative Writing program. "I was the Canadian. That's how they identified me."

During all this time Robert had been sending out short stories, "mostly magazines at that time." He published a couple of short stories in the Montrealer magazine about the time he was 21. "That confirmed for me that I could do it." It took another 16 years before he published his first

Non-Fiction

Alberta, MacMillan, 1968

Writers of the Prairies, University of British Columbia Press, 1973

The Lovely Treachery of Words, Oxford University Press, 1989

A Likely Story: The Writing Life, Red Deer College Press, 1995

Awards

- Governor General's Award for Fiction, 1969
- Officer of the Order of Canada, 2004

Short-listed

- Governor General's Award for Poetry, 2004

book. "That was quite an event for me." Although he was living in the United States at the time, he found that publishing the book established him as both a Canadian and an American writer. At the time, there wasn't a lot of Canadian literature in existence. "I wanted to be recognized in Canada. It was sort of an odd assumption that you could be a Canadian writer. There were no Canadian Lit courses or anything like that."

Robert began to feel he was contributing to the accumulation of Canadian literature. He was writing short stories and novels. He published three short stories in MacLean's magazine in the 1950s. After that he decided that the short story form did not suit him. Although he was writing fiction he was reading poetry at the same time. The more he read it the more he realized he liked what he was reading. He was fascinated by the way one could focus on language when writing poetry. "I was a late starter. I didn't try writing poetry until I was well into my 30s. I had a psychologist tell me once that there was something very strange about that. Ordinarily you begin with poetry when you're young and graduate to other stuff." Starting late or not, Robert now concentrates on writing poetry and novels. "It's like being a split personality. I do one or the other. I can't do both at once."

Regardless of whether he is working on a poem or a novel his writing routine is basically the same. For much of his life the routine was shaped to accommodate the fact that he was a university professor. He taught English and Creative Writing at the State University of New York for 17 years. When he left there he moved to Winnipeg and taught for 17 years at the University of Manitoba. While he was teaching he would get up and write for a couple of hours before going to his office. "If you write for an hour or two a day it accumulates." The routine that started many years ago out of necessity is continued even though he no longer has to worry about office hours or a teaching load. "You have to understand your body if you want to be a writer. In the morning I think I can create the world."

The ideas for creating that world come from reading. "I get interested in a

certain kind of story." And ideas have always come from his life experiences. However, Robert finds that these kinds of ideas seem to come less frequently as he grows older. "When I was a kid there were no stories about Alberta and I remember saying, 'I'm going to write some stories about Alberta. I feel pretty strongly that I did tell some of the story of Alberta.'"

Telling the story of Alberta isn't as simple as just setting down some words on the page and considering the job done. There are hours and hours spent revising the words before sending the manuscript out to a publisher. "I like revising. Some people think that revising is changing a word or a comma. Actually, you have to re-imagine the work and ask what is this all about. You have to let your imagination go at it in an open way. Anything can change."

Keeping track of the number of times he revises a manuscript isn't as easy to do now that he works on a computer. When he first began writing he used on a typewriter; "Most kids don't know what a typewriter is now." Then it was easier to count the number of times a piece was revised. There were times when he would type 20 different versions of the work before he was satisfied with it.

Robert tends to write the piece as a whole and then go back and revise it. He cautions, "Don't start editing too soon. Just let it happen. But when you do start to edit you have to be a tough editor. You have to identify something as cliché or realize you don't like it."

In order to help with the editing process, Robert feels that critiquing groups are a good idea. "The notion of the solitary artist is a very bad model that got going in our society. There is a reason why the writer goes to the pub in the afternoon. They've been alone all day! You have to be part of a community." And being part of a critiquing group will help to make one part of a community. But, being part of a group doesn't mean that one can shirk responsibility for one's own work. "You still have to put the heat on yourself." Being part of a group gives one a chance to see and

hear what other writers are doing. It gives the writer a sympathetic audience.

In spite of his thought about writers' groups, he has not been a member of a group himself. "I think as a kid I was secretive. I don't know why." Nevertheless, he does show his work to a couple of his friends who are not writers. They don't hesitate to tell him when they find a section of his work that is boring. "If you're boring, you're in trouble." And he gives his work to his partner before he sends it out. "She is a good reader."

Although writers' groups and significant friends can offer support and make useful suggestions, one often in life has persons who would be considered mentors. Robert acknowledges that frequently his mentors were other writers whose work he read but who were no longer living. However, he singles out one particular writer, Harry Swadof, one of instructors at the University of Iowa, as the person who taught him a lot about taking the ordinary and turning it into the extra-ordinary. "Unfortunately, he died quite young, but he showed me how your life is full of stuff to write about. That was an important lesson."

As a mentor himself, Robert sees the role as having several functions. "The first is to help the student find his/her subject. Often the person wants to write but doesn't know what to write about." A second function is to make sure the student understands that the way you write is not necessarily The Way to write. "You have to be kind of self-erasing. You have to say 'what we're trying to do here is find your way of writing.' That's important. You function as a role model. Here's the way I did it but how you do it in your time is different."

Robert has been writing stories and poetry for more than 60 years and has been a mentor for beginning writers for more than half that time. He still finds the whole process as exciting now as when he first began. "I think that's one of the great things about being a writer. An athlete is finished at 32 but a writer can go on all of his or her life and be excited

about writing and performing. I still feel wonder that you can change the blank page into something that has emotions and story and meaning and all those things." While still finding the excitement, he acknowledges that writing is harder now than when he began. "You don't want to just repeat yourself. You know where the bar was the last time you tried to go over it and you want to set it higher. And writing is hard physical work."

Hard work that takes a long time to gain recognition. To be sure he has received considerable recognition for his work, having been awarded one Governor General's Award, short-listed for another and been made an Officer of the Order of Canada. Robert says he thinks awards are important because they are one way of determining when a writer has become a writer. "If you're a writer, you're always proving to yourself that you are a writer. You finished one book and you wonder can I ever write another one?. Awards are a little pat on the back that says keep at it." He also cautions that "You know when you win an award there are lots of other people just as deserving. You're not unique."

Certainly, when it comes to receiving awards, Robert doesn't treat the winning of them as part of his self-definition of success. "For me it is in the writing. Sometimes, success is the act of writing. Success to me means that I actually did the writing. I would hate to think that at the end of my life I should have done some writing but I didn't. I don't really think about awards and I'm surprised if I get one."

Robert has won accolades for his writing but he is equally aware that the community doesn't always think that what a writer does should be supported. "The job of writing is to explore and sometimes you have to come up with uncomfortable truths. You have to let the writer investigate." He feels that is the job of the writer. Robert is really opposed to the kind of censorship that prevents writers from exploring and writing. "In some cultures the writer is a great critic of the culture. For us, I think it is more basic in that we have to tell our story. We're still such a new country that our job is to give voice to ourselves. We need to tell our story."

Telling stories is not always easy. There are times when Robert finds that the writing just won't happen. When the writing is fighting him he sometimes find it best to just leave it alone. At times like that he will often read. Another technique for getting past the block is to find somebody to talk to. "If you have a friend you can talk to, start telling him/her the story or poem. Trying to articulate it makes you understand it." And once one understands the writing one is doing, the blockage is overcome. But how does the writer know when it is finished? "A piece is finished when I notice that I'm changing it for the sake of change. This is a good question because some children quit too soon. You have to believe that you can do it."

He is currently working on another novel and accumulating more poetry for another book. The novel is giving him some difficulties but they are ones he will certainly overcome. "I have a scene with a lot of children in it and I'm having trouble writing the way children talk. They speak a kind of dialect. As a writer, as an old guy, it's pretty presumptuous to say that I can capture it." In his recent poetry he has been using his own life as a subject. "I'm not trying to be a realist about it, it's sort of surreal." Regardless, Robert continues not only believe he can do it but he does it.

Written May 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Courtesy of Ben Lemphers/Edmonton Life magazine

Alice Major

She sits at the back of the room and watches. She speaks in a soft voice. But don't let that fool you. Alice Major knows she is a writer and what's more she has been writing since she was about eight years old.

Alice was born in Scotland but immigrated with her parents early in her life and grew up in Toronto. In her world as a child, her father would make up poems, often humorous, in the tradition of Robert Burns and then recite them when the family was gathered around the dinner table. "I thought this was severely normal," Alice comments. Perhaps he did this to encourage his children to investigate the world of words despite the fact there were not a lot of books in the household. Certainly her love of poetry comes from these early experiences with her father's poems. Hers was a world filled with words. Encouraged by her parents, Alice dove into that world. "We had a set of books we called THE BIG BOOKS, which were the *Newnes Books of Knowledge*, that contained a wealth of mythology and poetry. And I was a library fanatic once I found out there were libraries."

The library yielded titles like the Narnia stories, which Alice couldn't get enough of. "I ended up sitting in the closet in our basement apartment waiting for it to turn into Narnia." But her interest in fantasy didn't end there. If it wasn't Narnia then it was *Wind in the Willows* that she was reading. "There was always the general idea that I would be a writer and my mum encouraged that, but we didn't have any picture of what that would look like." The idea of actually becoming a writer was shaped by her love of the Lucy Maude Montgomery stories. From Montgomery it seemed

Bibliography

Poetry

Time Travels Light, Rowan, 1992

Tales for an Urban Sky, Broken Jaw Press, 1999

Lattice of the Years, Bayeux Arts, 1999

Corona Radiata, St. Thomas Press, 2000

Some Bones and a Story, Wolsak and Wynn, 2001

No Monster, Poppy Press, 2002

The Occupied World, University of Alberta Press, 2006

The Office Tower Tales, University of Alberta Press, 2008

[NEW]

Children's Fiction

The Chinese Mirror, Clarke Irwin, 1988

Forthcoming

Memory's Daughter, University of Alberta Press, 2010

[NEW]

to Alice that if you lived in the country and sent off your work, somehow it would be magically accepted. "That was a pretty good briefing about becoming a writer except that I didn't live in the country so wasn't quite sure how to go about it."

Alice wrote her first poem when she was about eight years old. It was four lines long. And although she continued to write all through elementary and high school she never showed her work to anyone, nor did she tell anyone about her fascination with words. When she graduated from university, "there wasn't a poet-wanted ad" in the newspapers so she began to work as a bank teller. It wasn't long before she looked around for something that would give her a chance to use her skill with words, so she got a job in a public relations firm. Through this she began doing work for the Canadian Community Newspaper Association, which led her to place an ad: "Experienced reporter available." "That was an out-and-out lie." Nevertheless, she not only got a job working for the newspaper in Williams Lake, British Columbia, they were willing to pay her moving expenses to get there. She worked in Williams Lake for two years and then moved to Edmonton to "scrape up a little gold off the sidewalks and go back home [Toronto]." Things didn't go entirely according to plan – as it turned out, she never left Edmonton and dropped the idea of returning to Toronto.

In Edmonton she was employed by the public relations department of an electric utility serving northern Alberta. There she met Shirley Serviss, who worked for a sister company, a gas utility. Shirley invited her to attend a writing group that had grown out of a creative writing class taught by poet Bert Almon at the University of Alberta.

Despite the fact that Alice had been writing poetry since she was eight, she didn't yet have a large body of work to show. Her poems generally were the kind that one wrote when in a jam or some form of emotional anguish. The writing group met once a month and she came to the realization that if she is going to be an active part of the group she had to have something to take to the meetings. It's not that she wasn't familiar

Awards

- Shaunt Basmajian Chapbook Competition, 1998
- Alberta Writing for Youth Competition, 1988
- Poets Corner Award, 1999
- Malahat Review Long Poem Competition, 2001
- Poet Laureate, City of Edmonton, 2005 - 2007
- Pat Lowther Award, League of Canadian Poets, 2009 [NEW]
- Trade Book of the Year, Alberta Book Publishers Association, 2009 [NEW]

Short-listed

- Pat Lowther Award, League of Canadian Poets, 2002
- City of Edmonton Book Prize, 1999, 2000, 2009
- Stephan G. Stephanson Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2000, 2006, 2007

Memberships

- Edmonton Arts Council
- Writers Guild of Alberta
- League of Canadian Poets
- Writers Union of Canada

with deadlines, it was just that she had never had one for her poetry. She could no longer “wait around until the muse strikes me.”

This writing group has been active for twenty-five years. “Belonging to this critiquing group has been invaluable to me. Not so much for the line-by-line but to see how your work hits somebody else. There is nothing like a group of attentive readers sitting around looking at your poem to give you that kind of feedback.”

It wasn’t until after she had been a member of the writing group that she began to send her work out to be published. She notes that she was already in her 30s when she started to do this. “The nice thing about writing poetry is that it’s not something you have to do as if you were an athlete trying to qualify for the Olympics.” She was fortunate that the first poem she sent out was accepted. “Good thing or I might not have gone on.” She also notes that the poem was one she had been working on for years and had workshopped at her writers’ group. “I don’t think I could have been any happier than I was the day that I got the letter.”

With her poetry beginning to find its own place in the magazines, Alice felt the pull of another childhood love: fantasy. “There were never enough of the Narnia stories so I thought I would write my own.” Her first foray into writing fiction resulted in a novel for young adults. “It was a case of writing fiction, which is different from writing poetry, but not as different as people might think. Both forms call on the same skills.” Having said that, the places where a story starts and a poem begins are very different. “When I write fiction it is coming from the visual part of my brain - imagining a scene, what a character looks like, almost like looking at a film. With a poem I can have all the ideas in the world — what I want to put into the poem — but it has to start somewhere in the auditory cortex. It has to start with something I hear, a line, a sound, a pattern. Until I’ve got that the poem isn’t going anywhere.”

Poetry or prose, her writing routine is not overly organized and even so

will vary from time to time depending on what the project is. If she is working on a big project with a specific deadline, then she'll concentrate on that project until it is finished. But, "When I don't have anything else coming at me, I like to stare out the window and think. My creative time is morning. I like to edit at a different time of the day." Alice spends more time editing a piece than she does initially getting the words on the page. "It can take me months or years to figure out what is wrong with it. When I wrote my four line poem at age 8 I don't think I expected to have to re-write it. It is something you grow into."

Something else that a writer has to grow into is the realization that when he/she is asked where ideas come from, it may be that the questioner is not literally asking about the source of the idea but rather, "how do I turn the idea into a poem?" When faced with this question, Alice will often tell the students that poems are about feelings. "But if you come to me and tell me you're feeling blue, that's not a poem. It's how that feeling is turned into interesting language that makes it a poem. Poetry comes a lot from your life but it's not a diary." If you want the literal answer to the question, then she gets her ideas from all kinds of places including other contemporary poets, poets and forms from another era, and, as she has already said, from her own life.

No matter where the ideas come from, or how long she has been honing her craft, the practice of writing is still both easier and harder at the same time. "I can turn out a competent free verse poem fairly easily but it is harder to surprise myself. One of the things you are trying to do is continually explore the world with poetry. If you say the same things over and over again, you're not creating a new poem."

It is what you do with the ideas, the new ways you explore your world, that gets your work noticed and onto award short-lists or winners' lists. As to whether or not awards play a role in her self-definition of success, Alice says, "I have to say that they do, in that there is always an award out there that you would like to win." Awards are important in general because they

indicate that the writer has really connected with someone outside his or her sphere. "They are quite insidious, however. If you start trying to write for prizes, it's almost a guarantee that you're going to write a mediocre poem every time. I think the thing to remember about awards is that they are very linked to fashion — the current fashion for good writing and interesting subject matter. And they don't always stand the test of time. Awards don't necessarily recognize a bad poet but they don't always recognize all the good poets."

In spite of the awards that Alice has won or been short-listed for, "If I measure success by awards, recognition and reviews, I still look at myself and think, 'Oh, a minor poet.' If I think about the people who come up to me, as somebody did recently with my new book (*The Occupied World*), and say, 'Oh you make me look at things in a different way,' I think, 'What more could I ask for?'"

An award that Alice is especially proud of is her appointment for two years as Poet Laureate for the City of Edmonton. She is the very first poet to receive this award. Alice says that the idea for a Poet Laureate came from the mayor of Edmonton, Stephen Mandel, who put the idea into his platform during his election campaign. The poet is chosen by a jury comprised of city councillors, members of the community-at-large and a poet. The incumbent is expected to write three poems a year to celebrate events in Edmonton and make special appearances at city functions. "Most of the job is to be ambassador. I've been to the Rotary Club for breakfast at seven and on another occasion attended a meeting of the Downtown Business Association." As well as being an ambassador attending breakfast meetings and luncheons, Alice has been heavily involved with establishing a Poetry Festival in Edmonton.

The position of Poet Laureate has moved Alice beyond just the writing community into the community-at-large. There she sees at least one role for writers. "I do think that writers are the people who put down what the ordinary person is thinking but hasn't crystalized into words. Not

that writers feel anything different from other people, we just have a set of skills, language skills, that we've honed so that we can articulate the dreams and aspirations and concerns of society. I think that people who are readers can recognize themselves in this."

Sometimes the writer writes things in which the members of the community-at-large don't recognize themselves and then the issue of censorship comes up. "I am appalled, obviously, when they do silly things like try to censor Harry Potter because there is magic in it. When you censor something that is an exploration of the human spirit, there is a dialogue that is going to go on about what's the acceptable range of human behaviour. The thing I don't like about the censorship issue on either side is the assumption that there is a ready answer — that we can prejudge every case. I think there are genuine cases of pornography, for instance, that are not healthy, that are outside the range of that dialogue and should not be encouraged. But, burning books, no I don't think that is a good thing."

A role that writers often fulfill in both the writing community and the community-at-large is that of mentor. Alice says, "If I can be of any use to people in sharing what I've learned, I love doing that. I love talking about poetry. It's not that I know more than anyone else, it's just 'here's what I've found, take it or leave it.'"

What Alice is sure she has found about herself is that she can't leave her writing. She recently received the first Canada Council grant she has ever gotten. It will help her write another book of poetry. When asked about the future she says, "If I can go on writing I will be a happy woman."

Revised September 2009.

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Sid Marty

Sid Marty is a poet, a non-fiction writer, a singer and song writer, and a man of the mountains, specifically the Rocky Mountains of Alberta.

As a small boy, Sid traveled a lot as his father was a trucker and the family often followed him where ever the work lead. By the time Sid was ready for Grade 1, the family had a home in Medicine Hat and that's where he went to elementary school. The family then moved to Calgary where Sid graduated from High School. After High School he entered Mount Royal College in the university transfer program and did transfer from there to Sir George Williams University in Montreal. "It was one of the luckiest bits of fortune in my life to wind up down there instead of Calgary. In Montreal I was surrounded by professional writers. Leonard Cohen walked up and down my street every day. One could chat with him in the local bistros. Irving Layton was an inspirational figure. Al Purdy came to deliver some readings. Everybody including Allan Ginsberg showed up in Montreal at one point or another. I was just drinking in this literary feast constantly. I guess Montreal was my Paris."

Sid began writing essays and poems while he was still in Grade school. He would enter them in contests at the Medicine Hat Stampede. He won a number of times in a row. Sid's parents were supportive of him but as neither of them had a lot of education they must have scratched their heads a bit and wondered where this desire to write came from. His mother was the first one to take him to the Medicine Hat library and, "It is a good thing that she did as it was probably one of the most important things to happen in my life - the discovery of the library." After that he says he be-

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Men for the Mountains, McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
Vanguard Press, New York, 1979.

A Grand and Fabulous Notion: The First Century of Canada's Parks, N.C. Press and Government of Canada, 1985

Leaning on the Wind, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., Toronto, San Francisco and Sydney, 1995, reissued, Heritage House, 2009

Switchbacks: True Stories of the Canadian Rockies, McClelland and Stewart, 1999. Reprint 2001.

The Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek, McClelland and Stewart, 2008, reprint 2008.

Poetry

Headwaters, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1973, reissued 1979.

Nobody Danced with Miss Rodeo, McClelland and Stewart, 1981

Sky Humour, Black Moss Press, 1991

Music

Let the River Run, produced by David Wilkie for Centre Fire Records, 1991

Elsewhere, produced by Tim Williams for Centre Peak Productions, 2001

came a real patron of the library often lugging home armloads of books.

He continued his writing of poems and essays throughout his school years, although it was not until he entered Mount Royal College he was sending out poems and getting some of them published. However, he was also writing songs and performing them where ever he could get a gig in Calgary. "I was thinking of myself as a folk musician."

When he moved to Montreal he continued to write songs and perform them in local clubs as one way of earning some money to help with expenses. He also began writing poems again on a regular basis and sent them out to small literary magazines. And, he was getting them published. In spite of being surrounded by many well known writers such as Layton, Purdy, George Bowering and Frank Davey, Sid didn't get to work on his writing with any of them. He did take a course in modern poetry from Irving Layton but not a creative writing course. "I got to know him and I was certainly inspired by his example and his attitude toward poetry. I liked his feisty attitude that poetry was important and that writing poetry was the most important thing you could do."

While in Montreal he began to have some significant success in publishing his poetry. The most significant was publication in the magazine Canadian Forum. As a result of his getting poems published and after graduating from Sir George Williams University first with a BA in 1967 and then with an Honours English equivalent degree in 1970, he came to the attention of editors, Al Purdy being one of them, who were bringing out the anthology *Soundings*.

After graduation from Sir George Williams, Sid was accepted for graduate school at the University of Calgary. He completed a year and then dropped out to join the Park Warden Service full time. This was not an entirely new career. In the early '60s, Sid had climbed many standard routes at Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park, and was familiar with the rugged terrain around the lake. His timing was opportune - the Park Ser-

Awards

- Best Non-fiction Award, Province of Alberta, 1979
- Best Non-fiction of 1978 and Silver Medal, Canadian Author's Association, 1979
- Mountain Literature Award, Banff Festival of Mountain Books, 1995, 1999.
- Grant MacEwan Literary Arts Award, Province of Alberta, 2008.
- Grand Prize, (joint winner), Banff Mountain Book Festival, 2008
- Canadian Rockies Award, Banff Mountain Book Festival, 2008
- Mountain Summit Award, distinguished achievement, Banff Mountain Festivals, 2009
- Mount Royal University, Legacy award, distinguished achievement, 2009.

Short-listed

- Governor General's Award for Non-fiction, 1995.
- Governor Generals Award for Non-fiction, 2008.

vice needed somebody who knew that terrain to provide first responder search and rescue services for lost or injured persons. He was invited to apply for this job (in 1965) and he was accepted, initially in a seasonal position. He competed for and obtained a full-time park warden position from 1972 until 1978. Since then he has returned to the Service twice: as a volunteer involved in the search for bears involved in a serious mauling in 1980; and secondly as a Seasonal Park Warden for 6 months in 1988. His book, *Black Grizzly of Whiskey Creek*, was a result of his volunteering.

Sid's first published book was a book of poetry, *Headwaters*. It was after this book was published in 1973 that he began working on the book that would put him in the middle of a controversy that would eventually bring his Park Warden career to an end.

About the time he was beginning to work on his book *Men for the Mountains*, he was approached by a parks official in Ottawa with the idea that he be seconded to Ottawa to work on an official history of Parks Canada. On the surface, this looked like quite an opportunity. However, Sid realized that this offer would turn into a job of considerable magnitude. "I felt it would not be a case of me going to Ottawa for a year and knocking off this book." The more he looked at the task the more he realized he really didn't want to take it on. For one thing, the people in the national office wanted him to follow and at the same time combine four volumes of a history already written. "I could see this turning into a long stint in Ottawa. I was just a young fellow and in love with the mountains. I was not really crazy about going to Ottawa."

Shortly after making the decision not to move to Ottawa, Sid was visiting in Toronto and was invited by Jack McClelland to join him for drinks. Not every poet who knew Jack got invited to have drinks with him so this was very intriguing. Jack suggested that Sid should try his hand at a prose book about the mountains. Sid admitted that he had been thinking about writing a history of the Park Warden Service but had no idea if he had enough talent to do it. Jack told him he thought that he had the

talent and what was more, if he (Sid) would commit to writing the book, Jack had a contract in his jacket pocket. After thinking about it for a short time, Sid signed the contract. This proved to be a serious economic error on his part, which resulted in long delays to the project, which was seriously underfunded. At one point, as the project dragged on towards a conclusion, Jack must have gotten really worried. He sent Sid an airline ticket, put him up in a Toronto hotel and urged him to write. The process was that Sid would turn out page after page of text every day, on a rented typewriter, and his editor came to his hotel every day and went over the pages. The next day Sid made the corrections he'd agreed to make and then continued to write new material. "It was a very difficult process and not anything to be recommended." However, the book, *Men for the Mountains*, did get finished and became an immediate best-seller.

Sid is established and recognized in several writing forms, including singing and songwriting, poetry and prose. When asked to rate the three genres into a hierarchy according to how pleasurable they were to write, he responded "I would say that playing the guitar and writing a song would be number one. Number two would be working on poetry and writing prose would be number three. Writing prose requires a huge commitment of time, although when the writing is going smoothly, "time flies by." Juggling all three genres, Sid says, can be challenging. "They probably get in the way of each other sometimes. One is probably a nuisance to the other." In spite of that he feels that getting an idea for a poem can be equally satisfying as writing a song or working on a piece of prose.

To get the writing done, Sid used to adhere to a writing routine. That routine changes a bit according to the other demands of his life. Nevertheless, he tries to get into his office in the morning and get some writing done. After working around his rural property he returns to his office in the evening to continue his writing or work on the prose and poetry submitted by students with whom he is working.

Since 1988 his main source of income has been his non-fiction writing,

along with proceeds from music gigs and conference appearances. "I'm not inclined to advise people to do what I did. When you're a freelance writer the cheques are slow in coming. I would not suggest to a family person that he or she quit a full time job to become a freelance writer."

Living in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Sid has never been at loss for material to write about. "Right from the beginning I've always been concerned about conservation and the environment. There's lots to write about when you live in the province of Alberta which is one of the worse managed places on earth in terms of managing the environment properly. Other ideas come from contact with other human beings. The human condition we're all in, the people you meet, the situations they are in, the things that make them happy or sad, the emotional impact they have on you."

"Once I begin, I find the revising process on prose a very pleasant process for me. Once I get the mass of text written, it's like the sculptor who gets a great big block of marble and studies it for days and days thinking about where to make the first blow with a chisel or carving tool. With poetry it's a bit more painful. The tendency is to read it and think it's done. Then to read it later and realize it's not done at all. I might revise a poem 100 times. Some poems, if you're not careful can be revised to death. They just change so much that you wind up throwing them out. Think about it before you change things. This applies to songs too."

Although Sid, says he thinks that critiquing groups can be beneficial to the beginning writer, he has had little interest in becoming involved with such a group. "They offer some support and encouragement to the beginning writer. After a while, I don't know what the utility is anymore." He is much more interested in reading other poets and reacting to what they have to say and reacting by means of his own poetical response.

He now finds that his reading and reacting to someone else's work has taken on a slightly different role - that of a mentor. He is working as a

mentor for four writers who are involved with the Wired Writing Studio program at the Banff Centre. A magazine approached Sid to write an article on grizzly bears but he was too busy to do so. He suggested a young writer he knew who took the job and wrote the article. "I think that's the kind of thing a mentor does. I think a mentor can send you work or give an address, or give you a phone number to help you out. A mentor can suggest that you send poems to a magazine, or as I did the other day when I was talking to a publisher, suggest that someone has a manuscript worth looking at." Sid says he really doesn't like the term "mentor." He feels that it has been co-opted by the corporate world and has lost much of its original meaning. "Think of me as an older colleague with more experience than you have right now. That seems to work okay." Perhaps, that's why he has difficulty when asked who his mentors are or were. "There were some writers who would definitely respond when I sent them work. John Newlove was one of them. Al Purdy was another. I think of Tom Wayman and Barrie McKinnon not so much as mentors as a colleagues."

"Oh yeah, I still get stuff rejected. I'm pretty jocular about it. Think about who's running some of these literary magazines. If it is a literary magazine at a university, it could be some first year undergraduate. What do they know about poetry? So my attitude toward literary magazines is yeah, great place to send your poems. The ones they reject are the ones you put together and send out to a publisher to get into a book. I have the same attitude toward Folk Music Festivals. I have a terrific relationship with the people who run them. I don't ask for a gig and they don't offer one

Don't misunderstand him. He's always happy to respond to presenters who are interested in his books or music. Sid has been invited to and attended festivals like the Banff Book Festival. "It's nice to be invited. The Banff Book Festival has been awfully good to me over the years. I think I've won five awards there. Last year they presented me with the Grand Prize and this year it was the Summit of Excellence Award. They've been so kind to me and I really appreciate it." In spite of the awards he has won,

Sid isn't under any illusions as to whether they are any kind of measure of success. "It's very nice to receive them and of course you should be gracious and properly respectful and thankful and I think I am. People mean these things very sincerely and if you're a jerk that isn't a good thing. You hurt people's feelings and make yourself look small. I'm always pleased to receive an award. I guess what I'm really saying here is, don't stake your whole career and your happiness on these damned awards, and by damned, I mean in particular the larger, national book prizes."

Sid may have non-fiction books and books of poetry published and CDs of the songs he's written professionally produced but he says that writing is always hard and it is getting harder. "Some things come easier than others. There are some of those wonderful poems that just come to you. You write them down and they don't change. That's a joy and a gift and a thrill when that happens. Sometimes some great passages of text get written and time flies by and you think, 'Oh man, this is great. Where did that come from. A lot of times you're just knocking your head against a wall on a magazine article and the deadline is coming and the ideas aren't flowing. It has to get done because you need the pay cheque."

Whether he is writing songs, poetry or non-fiction, Sid has always had a social conscience. "I certainly have some social responsibility especially as a non-fiction writer. I feel I have an obligation to tell people what they need to hear as opposed to what they want to hear. I can at least present the information to them. Whether they change is kind of difficult to accomplish. I guess I have a political agenda." Having said that, he adds, "You don't want to tie your destination as an artist completely to the here and now. You have to try and transcend it in a way that it will be interesting to people in the future. We are trying to create art of a fairly high standard. And the best nonfiction, by the way, is an art form although it is underestimated to death by some of the mental midgets who act as literary gatekeepers in this country."

Having a social conscience sometimes puts the writer at cross purposes

with the people who are reading his or her work. From time to time this conflict results in censorship - or at least an attempt at censorship of an author's work. "I'm absolutely opposed to censorship in all its forms. I sometimes think even including hate speech. I think it's really good to know who the nut jobs are, who the whackos and psychos are. Furthermore, if we let them shoot off their mouths, they may be content with that and not take to shooting off guns. I know it's hurtful but being a human being is hurtful. I think the way we compensate for that is by the rest of us taking on the nutters and making everybody else feel welcome.

At the end of the interview, Sid says that others ,(notaby, Charles Bukowski) have said that writing chooses you, you don't choose it. He agrees completely with that idea. "Other people might be able to give it up but I can't give it up because it doesn't give up on me."

Looking down the road five years he says, "I'll still be writing. I hope I will still be able to play the guitar and sing songs. I get a lot of personal satisfaction out of that. I hope to be living in the same place, in the same lifestyle. I also hope to have a couple more books published."

Written June 2010

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.ssmatheson.ca

Shirlee Smith Matheson

Shirlee Smith Matheson has lived on a farm near the Riding Mountains in Manitoba; on a farm near Sylvan Lake, Alberta, where her older brother still lives; in Lacombe, Alberta; Vernon and Hudson's Hope, British Columbia; in Australia; and in Calgary.

As a child she enjoyed the *Dr. Doolittle* books, *Mary Poppins* and the *Anne of Green Gables* series. However, she longed for stories about the prairies, which lead her to the nature books by Red Deer writer Kerry Wood. In Lacombe, when Shirlee tried to sign *Grapes of Wrath* out of the local library, the librarian refused until Shirlee agreed to report to her parents what book she had taken out. She loved John Steinbeck's books so much she credits his writing with influencing her own. Along with Steinbeck's work she discovered Margaret Laurence and Farley Mowat. Her parents always supported her reading and her writing. Her maiden name "Smith" as part of her full name is in tribute to them.

Becoming a writer, Shirlee thought, was not realistic for somebody whose writing consisted of keeping diaries and writing poems privately. However, when she and her husband moved to Vernon, she joined a writer's group. She began entering their Christmas contests and winning prizes for her short stories. For six or seven years Shirlee consistently won prizes in their contests.

Encouraged by these successes, she applied to the six-week Writing Program at the Banff Centre and was accepted. W.O. Mitchell was the head of the program; other instructors were Alistair MacLeod, Irving Layton,

Bibliography

Adult Non-Fiction

Youngblood of the Peace: (Lone Pine, 1987); 2nd edition, Detselig/Tameron Books, 1991

This Was Our Valley (co-authored with Earl K. Pollon): Detselig/Tameron Books, 1989; 2nd printing 1991; 2nd edition, 2003

Flying the Frontiers — A Half Million Hours of Aviation Adventure: Fifth House/Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1994; 7th printing 2005

Flying the Frontiers Vol. II, More Hours of Aviation Adventure: Detselig/Tameron Books, 1996; 2nd printing, 1997

Flying the Frontiers, Vol. III, Aviation Adventures Around the World: Detselig/Tameron Books, 1999

A Western Welcome to the World - The History of the Calgary International Airport: Cherbo Publishers, 1997

Lost — True Stories of Canadian Aviation Tragedies: Fifth House/Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2005

Maverick in the Sky: The Aerial Adventures of WWI Flying Ace Freddie McCall: Frontenac House, 2007

Amazing Flights and Flyers, Frontenac House, 2010

[NEW]

Teen Novels

Prairie Pictures, McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1989; 2nd printing 1994

City Pictures, McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1994 (sequel to *Prairie Pictures*); B. Wahlstroms Bokforlag, Sweden 1995

Flying Ghosts, Stoddart, 1993; 2nd printing 2005 (taken over by Fitzhenry/Whiteside)

The Gambler's Daughter, Beach Holme, 1998 (sequel to *Flying Ghosts*)

Keeper of the Mountains, Thistledown, 2000

Richard Lemm, Phyllis Webb and Orm Mitchell. "They set me on a professional path."

Ideas for books seem to present themselves, as Shirlee's move to Hudson's Hope confirms. *Youngblood of the Peace* came about when community members came to her with the idea. "It snowballed from there." Robert Kroetsch and Ruth Bertelson, from the Banff Centre course, offered to write letters supporting her application to Canada Council for a writing grant. Her second book, *This Was Our Valley*, came as a result of her and her husband both working on the Peace River power projects in British Columbia. Life continues to present her with ideas. As well as her work in non-fiction, she is a successful children's author. "It is a relief after working hard on a non-fiction book to work on a children's story." It isn't that one is easier than the other, just different.

Shirlee works at the Aero Space Museum Association of Calgary four days a week and writes for the other three days. "I've worked office hours for so much of my life that I work the same hours when I write," she says. She estimates that she does dozens of revisions. "For one short story I wrote 27 drafts. If I had done only 26 it might still be in my desk drawer." She seeks out authorities who are knowledgeable in the fields she is writing about to scrutinize her manuscripts. "I want the details to be exact. I write for the experts," she says. "I must get the work as good as possible before sending it out, because editors are so overworked they don't have time to clean up messes."

Shirlee's definition of success is taking pride in having written her books well and knowing that they add to society's collective knowledge. Awards are not the measure of success for her. "Awards are nice," she says. "Publishers like them because they mean extra sales and there is a certain validation ... but to get an award is not the be all and end all."

Shirlee says censorship is "the insidious restrictions that come about because a certain individual doesn't like your book or doesn't want that kind

Fastback Beach, Orca Book Publishers, "Orca Soundings" series: 2003

Jailbird Kid, Dundurn Group, 2010 [NEW]

Awards

- Alberta Culture: First prize for Non-Fiction; Roderick Haig-Brown B.C. Book Prize: finalist for *This Was Our Valley*, 1990 — *This Was Our Valley*
- 99s Organization of Women Pilots: Canadian Award in Aviation, 1999
- Athabasca University, Distinguished Alumni: 2001-2
- Emerald Award finalist for Environmental Excellence: 2001
- Northern Lights College, British Columbia: Honorary Associate of Arts degree, 2001
- Canadian Children's Book Centre "Choice" for all teen novels. (1992, '94, '95, '98; 2000, & '03)

Memberships & Associations

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers' Union of Canada
- Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators & Performers (CANSCAIP)
- Canadian Children's Book Centre
- Young Alberta Book Society
- Canadian Women in Aviation International, Rocky Mountain High Chapter
- Aero Space Museum of Calgary (Lifetime Member)
- British Columbia Aviation Museum
- Nanton Lancaster Society

of thing published." She asks, "How can you write about issues if you are not going to strike some sensitive points? If censorship stops somebody like me reading *Grapes of Wrath*, I think it is totally wrong." Shirlee acknowledges that she does self-censor her work. "If leaving a swear word out of a novel for young adults is self-censorship, then that is my choice, I'm the writer."

Shirlee acknowledges that she has had help along the way, such as from W.O. Mitchell and George Melnyk, as well as from professional associations through memberships in the organizations listed. In giving back to the community, she has taught many creative writing courses. She's served as Writer-in-Residence for the Alexandra Writers Centre Society (1997), the Medicine Hat Public Library/Medicine Hat College (1996), the Calgary Public Library (1998) and Don Bosco Elementary/Jr. High School (2001).

Shirlee enjoys giving public readings. Her readings and workshop attendees range from primary school students to adults. She can be contacted via her website (www.ssmatheson.ca) or through her publishers.

With ideas constantly coming to her, it isn't hard to imagine Shirlee's future. "Every time I finish an intense work I say I am never going to write another book. Then somebody comes along and says, 'Have you heard this story?'"

Revised January 2010

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Suzette Mayr

When Suzette Mayr was originally interviewed for a profile in 2004, she was asked if she thought that writing was harder at that time in her life than when she first began. She said then that it was not harder but it was not easier either. When she first began to write she was preoccupied with the need to get published and the uncertainty as to whether that would ever happen. Five years later, she doesn't hesitate to say that she thinks that writing is harder now than before. "It's because I know how much work it is now. When I wrote my first novel and was writing poetry it was all new and interesting and fresh. It may not have been the best writing but I'd never done it before." Now, working on her fourth novel, "I swear it's as if I'd never written a novel before. I'm finding I have to do a lot more work to be original and not repeat myself." In particular, she finds the real challenge is making sure that this work is original and not a repeat of something she has done before. And even though she may find the work harder she does feel reassured in the knowledge that she can do it. And that there is a good chance it will get published.

Suzette is not one of those writers who knew from an early age that all she wanted to do was write. In fact, throughout her school career, attending McDougall School, Westgate Elementary, Elboya Junior High, and Western Canada High School all in Calgary, she wasn't interested in writing at all. She was involved with Track and Field and the Dance committee. Possibly part of the reason for her lack of interest in writing was that reading didn't come easily to her as a student. It wasn't until she was in Grade 6 when she had a teacher, Marguerite Dodds-Belanger, who

Bibliography

Fiction

Honey Moon, NeWest Press, 1995

The Widows, NeWest Press, 1998

3 Witwen und ein Wasserfall, translation of *The Widows* by Christine Struh and Ursula Wulfekamp, Schneekluth Publishers Ltd, 1999

Venous Hum, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004

Awards

Short-listed

- George Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1996
- Henry Kreisel Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1996
- Commonwealth Prize, Canada-Caribbean Region, 1999

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers' Union of Canada

seemed to know how to get this young reluctant reader immersed in books, did she begin showing an interest in this direction. Once hooked she never stopped reading. Even so, her reading lead her to consider being either a visual artist or a zoologist, which is where she was headed when she entered the University of Calgary. There she discovered that she was doing much better in her English courses than in her Science courses. She changed direction, deciding to complete her degree in English. This coincided with a growing desire to capture her world. She took an Creative Writing course from Dr. Chris Wiseman in her third year and her focus changed dramatically.

Now writing is a major part of her life. A life which doesn't always allow a lot of time to be creative. Suzette teaches English and Creative Writing at the University of Calgary. It helps that her teaching schedule allows her to designate Fridays as her writing day. Otherwise, her days are filled with course preparation, classes, marking, and meeting with students. In spite of all of this she does create time for her writing.

There was a time when she would have said that she didn't really have a writing routine. Now she says that her routine is governed very much by where she is in any given project. "Right now I'm deep, deep, deep in a project. Having something that close to being done makes it easier to have a routine than when it's early stuff and you don't know where it's going."

"There is nothing scarier than the brand new white page. When you take writing seriously, you look at everything around you." That's where the ideas for her poems and novels come from -- from everything around her. She finds ideas in the newspaper, walking down the street, even cleaning out the fridge! If she can't use the idea right away, it goes into an "idea file" for future consideration.

While she has had poetry published in magazines and has three chapbooks as well, recently she has been concentrating more on writing fic-

tion. She has three novels published and is working on her fourth. The fact that she has written in both genres does make some difference in her writing. "I like to think that my prose is very much informed by my interest in poetry and my interest in looking at form and language and how one can manipulate those two things." Having said that, she isn't quite so certain that her prose has much influence on her poetry. "There may be more of a problem when one is stuck in the terror of the sentence." She still uses pen and paper, writing longhand, to help her work her way through a spot in a novel which is giving particular problems.

Discussing the problems that one is presented with can be helpful. Having a mentor can be really helpful. Suzette doesn't turn to her mentors as much as she did in the past but, "Aritha van Herk, Fred Wah, and Rudy Wiebe were all very instrumental for me when I was starting out." Now she finds herself more in the role of mentor. "When I've taught someone in class and they go on to write a really great book, it's so gratifying. It's great to be able to help someone make the best book that it can be. It goes back to the whole constellation thing."

And having a writing or critiquing group is another way of having that discussion. "It's really important to find somebody with whom you are simpatico as a writer and as a reader. It is okay to have a different aesthetic but if you can't even read each other in a way that is useful, that can be a problem." Although Suzette is in favour of participating as part of a group, work schedules and people moving away have prevented her from participating in such a group. In a concerted effort to be more proactive and develop her writing routine she went in search of a writing buddy. She found one in Nancy Jo Cullen. They met once a month in a coffee shop. "It was really, really casual. She was working on poetry and I was working on prose. We'd give each other our five pages and then socialize for awhile. It was good because it gave me a routine even if it meant sweating out the five pages the night before." Nancy Jo has moved away but Suzette has found another writing buddy in Rosemary Nixon. They actually meet

more frequently than Suzette met with Nancy Jo, and she and Rosemary are exchanging actual manuscripts. "Rosemary is one of the best editors I've ever seen so getting her is a great deal." Discussing her work with her writing buddies leads to at least six or seven radical rewrites of her work before sending it to a publisher.

As well as having a person or persons with whom to discuss the nuts and bolts of writing, Suzette feels it is also important to have somebody in your life who is simply your greatest fan. In her case it is her mother. Suzette remembers taking a finished poem to her mother to read. "At the age of 19, just finishing a poem was something for me." Her mother read it and declared it an excellent poem. "It was so powerful for me to have my mother say that it was an excellent poem."

And how does she know when it's finished? She knows it's time to stop when she finds herself editing stuff back to the way it was. Alternatively, especially when she is working with fiction, there are times "When I'm so fed up with it that I don't want to look at it any more. I've never finished something and thought that it was perfect." With poetry, "because it's so short, never over a page, I find myself more obsessed with getting it perfect word by word.

Another thing that comes with experience is learning the ways to deal with rejection. Suzette takes a pragmatic approach to this - she doesn't worry about it. It still happens from time to time although not as much as it once did. "It isn't that my work isn't any good but it may be it just doesn't fit for the magazine or publisher. Her advice to beginning writers? "Take the MS out of the envelope, throw the letter away, put it in a new envelope and send it out again. Why would you want to keep the rejection around?"

With each novel written, Suzette feels she has "raised the bar" with regard to her writing. And she isn't alone in that feeling. In 1996, her first novel was a finalist for the Henry Kreisel Award for Best First Book and for the

George Bugnet Award for Best Novel. Both awards are administered by the Writers Guild of Alberta. In 1999, her second novel was short-listed for the 1998 Commonwealth Prize for Best Book in the Canada-Caribbean Region. And these forms of recognition do bring other benefits. During 2002 - 2003, she was awarded the 10 month Canadian Writer-in-Residence under the Markin-Flanagan Program at the University of Calgary. In spite of her successes, she is very down-to-earth when it comes to awards. "If you worry about awards, you're going to get into trouble." Of course, Suzette likes the idea of winning awards for her work. But, "If that is all you're writing for, if that's how you are going to be validated as a writer then I think you're going to be in trouble. I find that awards are too much grounded in the flavour of the month. Having served on a few literary juries and having arguments with people on those juries, it's a really, really sad process." She remarks on an article in Quill & Quire by Paul Quarrington. He was talking about winning the Governor General's Award with one of his books and finding that his next book was much less successful. Apparently, he struggled with mixed feelings. Suzette says, "You can get so consumed by jealousy and competition." She recalls a comment made by Paul: "bitterness is the writer's black lung disease." She agrees completely with his sentiment. "I think we are a community where we have to support each other. Rather than one of us doing better than the other, I like to think of it as we're all part of this constellation. Some of us are brighter and some of us aren't as bright but we are all part, still part, of that bigger picture. And the constellation doesn't exist without all of us."

Her understanding of the award process leaves no room for awards themselves to be a significant part of her self-definition of success. "I've been thinking a lot about the question of success because you asked me that question so many years ago. I've been thinking about what that means." After having her previous novels all published by small presses and sometimes wishing that her work would be picked up by a larger press, after realizing that the book she is working on will also probably be

published by a small press, after coming to terms with these thoughts, "I think that success is the absolute joy that I get from working on my book on a Friday afternoon. Having a day when everything kinda fits. The images are working, the language is working, the images are coming off the page. I love those times when I'm going to bed and I'm still thinking about it." She adds a final thought to her definition of success. "I think I've reached success now whether the book is finished or not, where I'm writing a book and I don't want to let it go because I'm going to miss those people and the situations they're in."

Caught up in the stories she is telling, Suzette sees the role of the writer in the community at large as being that of the reporter telling a story. "I saw the movie *Naked Lunch*, and in that movie the writer's typewriter says something like, "Writers are just like everyone else, they just send reports." I thought that's exactly it! It's about documenting your place in time." The movie also reminded her of a talk that Alberta author Fred Stenson gave to the Writers Guild of Alberta. He suggested that when we think of the Victorian era, we don't get our information from the nonfiction books written then but from authors such as Charles Dickens. "For me, that is Charles Dickens sending his report from that time and place in time. There's the big broad strokes of history, the who, what, when, where and why. What's more important is what happens in people's houses. How do they love? How do they cope with tragedy?"

As well as being a "reporter" Suzette suggests that the role of the writer is to give "Other points of view, of being the rabble rouser who questions things and creates the discomfort that makes a vibrant society." Sometimes when the writer does fulfill this role, he or she comes into conflict with that society. At those times, censorship can and sometimes does, raise thorny issues. "When it comes to kiddy porn. When there is no conceptuality. When there is exploitation, I don't think that is good for anybody. Then there is a place for censorship. With the phrase, freedom of expression, there is the word freedom in there. And freedom means

freedom for everybody." Where it gets more interesting and less cut and dried for Suzette is when a disturbing scene is written because it is integral to the story being told. She sites Timothy Findley's struggle with himself over the use of profane language in *The Wars* and the inclusion of the same sex rape scene. In the end, despite advice from other well - known writers as well as many of his friends, he cut most of the profane language out of the book and kept the rape scene. "Being afraid of school boards and libraries and some times moments of self-censorship, that I find disturbing." Also disturbing for her is the issue which, while perhaps not strictly considered censorship, has a similar effect. The changing of the names of specific places and things (often Canadian) in a book by the publisher based on the idea that these things would not appeal to the readership outside the local area. "I want my report to be authentic. Writing my report means there's got to be certain things in there."

Suzette will continue to write her "reports." Her job teaching at the University of Calgary is as secure as any teaching position can be in these times. She has a positive relationship with her partner. She is well into her fourth novel and enjoying the work. The future for her is simply to keep on keeping on.

Written March 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



George Melnyk

George Melnyk, originally from Winnipeg, arrived in Edmonton after graduating from the University of Toronto in 1972. Nothing in his formal education prepared him to be an editor, publisher and writer but in Edmonton he began a 34 year career as all three. "History and philosophy pushed me toward non-fiction, then my political interests got me into a kind of independent journalism." Interests such as western Canadian regionalism, especially as it pertained to western culture and prairie literature, were top on his list.

Soon after moving to Edmonton, George published a volume of work under the imprint NeWest Press, edited by poet Tom Wayman. In 1975 he founded the magazine *NeWest Review*, a monthly non-fiction magazine and by 1977 he had established the non-profit publishing house NeWest Press. That same year saw NeWest's first book edited by Rudy Wiebe. Four years later (1981) NeWest published George's first authored book, *Radical Regionalism*. In 1982 George sold the nonprofit press to its editorial board for one dollar. The establishment of first the magazine and then the press were part of "the era of the 1970s which was very much tied to Canadian nationalism ... I and NeWest Press were very much tied to that whole flow of things."

In 1985 George accepted the position of Executive Director of the Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts and moved to Calgary. As Executive Director, a position which he held until 1988, he oversaw the administration of lottery funds in the form of grants provided by the Alberta Government to writers, publishers and libraries around the province.

Bibliography

Non-Fiction

Of the Spirit, The Writings of Douglas Cardinal, Editor, NeWest Press, 1978

Radical Regionalism, NeWest Press, 1981

The Search for Community: From Utopia to a Co-operative Society, Black Rose Books, 1985

Partners in Enterprise: The Worker Ownership Phenomenon, Black Rose Books, 1989

Beyond Alienation: Political Essays on the West, Detselig, 1993

Urban Prairie (The Art of Western Canadian Cities), Co-author, Fifth House, 1993

The Literary History of Alberta: Volume One From Writing-on-Stone to World War Two, University of Alberta Press, 1998

The Literary History of Alberta Volume Two From World War Two to the End of the Century, University of Alberta Press, 1999

New Moon at Batoche: Reflections on the Urban Prairie, Banff Centre Press, 2000

Canada and September 11: Impact and Response, Co-editor, Temeron/Detslig, 2002

The Poetics of Naming, University of Alberta Press, 2003

The Wild Rose Anthology of Alberta Prose, Co-editor, University of Calgary Press, 2003

One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema, University of Toronto Press, 2004

Canada and the New American Empire: War and Anti-War, editor, University of Calgary Press, 2004

My Mother is an Alien, Banff Centre Press, 2004

Great Canadian Film Directors, U of A Press, 2007 **[NEW]**

From 1988 until 1993 George worked as a freelance editor, writer and consultant. "All those years the principal income earner was Julia, my wife. ... It wouldn't have been possible without her successful career." Looking back, "The issue for me was the loneliness of the writing and trying to maintain some kind of social life. When I'm on a roll I'll write between 1000 and 2000 words a day. We're talking two to three hours. So, what do you do with the other 21 hours of your day besides the eight hours that you sleep?"

Among the things he did was become President of the Writers Guild of Alberta from 1992 to 1993. George thinks that organizations are very important to work-a-day writers by providing social contact, help with improving writing skills, contact information, and all those things that make us feel part of a legitimate profession.

His writing workday might be only two or three hours long but his revision process is extensive: often a dozen revisions of a short story. His non-fiction writing will go through at least three or four revisions. Once in a while George will turn a first draft over to a fellow writer for input, but he has never belonged to a critiquing group. "It goes back to my early years as an editor and publisher."

From 1985 to 2000 George wrote eight books. During that time he also edited or co-edited another two books and co-authored still another book. The result was to consolidate the reputation as a public intellectual that he had begun to build during the 1970s.

Thirty years as a writer has given his life a sense of unity that formed the framework of his career. In 2000, largely due to the publishing of the two volume *Literary History of Alberta*, he became a full-time instructor at the University of Calgary, teaching Canadian Studies. Keeping a "foot" in both camps, the academic and the writing, has been a real juggling act.

With membership in the academic community comes the pressure to

Poetry

Ribstones, Ekstasis Editions, 1996

Elegy for a Poem Garden, Ekstasis Editions, 2006

Awards

- Scholarly Book of the Year Award, Book Publishers Association of Alberta, 2000

Short-listed

- Wilfred Eggleston Non-Fiction Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1994
- Wilfred Eggleston Non-Fiction Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1999
- City of Calgary W.O. Mitchell Book Prize, 2000
- Wilfred Eggleston Non-Fiction Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2000

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers Union of Canada
- Film Studies Association of Canada

publish academic works. Since 2000 he has written four books and edited or co-edited three more. His two collections of essays have helped to keep his identity as a writer." Non-fiction writing drains me so much. I go back to recharge my batteries with creative writing." The result is his second book of poetry.

Despite publishing a total of 18 titles (and another manuscript at a publisher), for George, success cannot be measured by the size of the public audience reached. Nor the number of book sales. He says, "If a book of mine sells 2000-3000 copies over some years, then it is doing really well. I'm a small-market writer and I say that with certainty and with honesty and a certain amount of pride, because I think the writing life is run by the writers who are not famous. Writing is like an iceberg. At the top you can see famous names but those guys exist because the 90% of the rest of us are producing books that keep the edifice afloat. I'm proud to be part of that 90%."

Since the late 1980s or early 1990s George has been keeping meticulous records regarding the length of time it takes to complete a project. For instance, he says that it will take him about 200 hours to edit a collection of essays written by other writers. That includes the obtaining of permissions etceteras. If, on the other hand, he is working on his own book, it may take between 500 and 1000 hours depending on the length of the book. "I think that the writing, in a sense, has gotten easier because I've learned more about the business of writing."

If the writing has become easier, the issues surrounding writing, in particular censorship, have not. "Censorship is something that I've dealt with since the time I was a CBC journalist in the 1970s when we did a story on a book called, *The Joy of Sex*. There is no society without censorship. There will always be censorship because there will always be issues of public morality in society ... and writers will always have to deal with it." Of greater significance to George is the issue of self-censorship. "That is the biggest issue that every writer has to face. It is not always a product of

cowardice or concern ... it may simply be driven by trying to give people what they want."

From the perspective of his career, he offers a suggestion to both new and established writers: "Measure yourself against yourself not against others. If you are progressing, if you are growing, whatever your final impact on the world, don't sweat it." As for his own writing, "I'm not going to stop writing, I'm not retiring."

Revised February 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.donmeredith.ca

Don Meredith

Don Meredith is one of those writers whose life fits into the world of writing as if everything he does were part of a greater plan.

Don was born in Los Angeles, California and grew up in the San Fernando Valley at a time "when there were still some wild places left there." It didn't take him long to become hooked on nature. Boys and insects often go together; insects were abundant in the valley and Don was fascinated by them.

Don's mother was an elementary school teacher. She and Don's father encouraged him to read at a young age. Some of the first books he read had to do with nature. A series by Edwin Wade Teal, a British writer who wrote about insects, became a favourite of Don's. His father encouraged the young naturalist by enrolling him in the Boy Scouts and then becoming a Scout leader in his troop.

With an environment like this to grow up in, by the time Don was in Grade 3 or 4 he was writing and illustrating picture stories and taking them to school. "I always liked telling stories." Writing was and has continued to be fun for Don. He had to write not one but two theses during his academic career and found the writing part of the task the least stressful.

Once out of high school, Don began a gradual migration north. He received a BSc. from Oregon State University, a MSc. from Central Washington State University and a Ph.D. from the University of Alberta. After receiving his Ph.D., he headed for the Canadian north and several jobs

Bibliography

Children's Fiction

Dog Runner, Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989, 2004 (iUniverse)

The Search for Grizzly One, iUniverse, 2005

Awards

- R. Ross Annett Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1990 -- *Dog Runner*
- Several Outdoor Writers of Canada awards for his magazine feature articles and columns, 2000—2006.
- Outdoor Writers of Canada, Best Book, 2006—*The Search for Grizzly One*

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writes Union of Canada
- President of Outdoor Writers of Canada [NEW]

doing arctic wildlife biology. In the mid-1970s he worked on the impact studies of the planned Polar Gas project on muskox and caribou . When the work in the Arctic gradually disappeared Don moved to Edmonton and joined the staff of the John Janzen Nature Centre. Here is where the joining of the two careers really took hold. Using his biological background, he wrote brochures, pamphlets and any other materials needed by the Centre.

Don's freelance writing career has covered a myriad of styles and topics. He has written government reports, interpretations of scientific reports for public awareness, brochures, corporate reports, a regular column in the *Edmonton Journal* on science for children, and articles for such magazines as *Canadian Geographic*. His freelance writing has run parallel to any "regular job" that he might have had at the time. This causes its own kind of problems within the family structure. Don is married and has one grown daughter. There were times when he was freelance writer and house husband while his daughter was growing up. In order to get both his writing done and accomplish whatever chores he might need to do during the day, he would wake between 3 and 4 in the morning and get up and write for a couple of hours before the rest of the house began to stir. This pattern continued even after he started to work for the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division. "I felt really good driving into work in the morning, because if nothing else got accomplished at least I had done my day's writing." Now, having retired from the Division after thirteen years, Don's start time is closer to 6 in the morning, but he still writes before the rest of the house starts its day. "This might not work for everyone, it means going to bed earlier than you might..."

It was while he was working at the John Janzen Nature Centre that Don became interested in dog sledding. His interest in this sport lead him to try yet another type of writing - fiction for children. The result was a novel which won the R. Ross Annett Award from the Writers Guild of Alberta in 1990. It was reprinted in 2004.

In 2005 his second novel, also based on his experiences in the north especially flying bush airplanes, was published.

Asked to consider the definition of success, he was careful with his answer: "To me, success is measured by writing, getting pieces published and having others read them. The most important thing for me is to have people read what I write. As a result, I think I have been successful."

There are a number of things that keep Don working at his writing. The first is, he likes to tell a story. He gets his greatest encouragement to continue writing from his family. The last thing is feedback from his readers. "It is important just to know that people are reading and responding to what I write. If I was writing and nobody was reading what I write I would probably stop."

He is one of those exceptions to the creative writing rules, "don't look for good comment from family or friends." Don has never belonged to a critiquing group, although he thinks it could prove useful to the beginning writer. His wife is his first editor. He says she is quite clear in telling him when she thinks he has failed to make his point with his writing.

Of the role that writers play in society, Don says it is a question of interpretation. "A writer helps people put the pieces together... make connections big or small... work out the bigger picture."

Don has been a member of the Writers Guild almost since it began. He was on the 1985-86 Executive as a Member-at-Large. During that year he participated on a committee struck by the organization to create professional standards for the membership. "I'm a joiner. Being a member of organizations gives you support, lets you find out you're not alone in the world, gives you information, and allows you to meet with people doing the same thing you are doing - you can talk shop."

In the next five years Don would like to have a couple more novels published, and a book of essays he has been working on completed. "Writing

is something you'll never master, but you can always learn." Retirement provides him with time to learn more about his craft and those around him who are part of it. "Writers are a diverse group, you can't pigeon-hole them, but they can still come together to learn."

Revised February 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

<http://www.fitzhenry.ca/>

<http://www.yabs.ab.ca>

Tololwa Mollel

In the Journal of the Faculty of Education, McGill University, Tololwa Mollel says, "The Maasai call the art of the spoken word and conversation, literally translated, 'eating words' or 'feasting on words.'" Growing up in Tanzania, the son of a school teacher, he has always feasted on words.

There were few books around his childhood home. Those that were, belonged to his father and were almost as untouchable as his father's shotgun. Tololwa couldn't wait to start school so that he would have books of his own. Later, when he was sent to live with his grandparents, eventually to attend boarding school, access to books became easier. Some of his favourites were: *Treasure Island*, *Arabian Nights*, *Grimms Fairy Tales* translated into Swahili, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Three Musketeers*.

In the structured Tanzanian education system, Tololwa studied literature, history and geography. The choice of those subjects pointed him in the direction of becoming, as his grandfather wanted, a teacher. But while he was in high school Tololwa saw his first professionally done play. He was fascinated. A second encounter with theatre, in which he not only wrote a play but directed it and held the leading role, clinched a decision diametrically opposed to what appeared to have been already decided for him. "It felt really really great to see people speaking my lines. I would study theatre."

At university in Dar es Salaam, he was one of three people enrolled in the theatre program. Plays written for three characters were scarce so Tololwa and his fellow students created their own. At the end of university he

Bibliography

Children's Fiction

Rhinos for Lunch and Elephants for Supper, Oxford University Press 1991; Clarion Books, 1992

A Promise to the Sun, Little, Brown & Company, 1992

The Princess Who Lost Her Hair, Troll Books, 1992

The King and the Tortoise, Clarion Books, 1993; Lester Publishing Company, 1993

The Flying Tortoise, Oxford University Press, 1994; Clarion Books, 1995

Big Boy, Clarion Books, 1995

Kele's Secret, Lodestar Books, 1997

Ananse's Feast, Clarion Books, 1997

Dume's Roar, Stoddart Publishing Company, 1997

Kitoto the Mighty, Stoddart Publishing Company, 1998

Shadow Dance, Clarion books, 1998

Song Bird, Clarion Books, 1999

My Rows and Piles of Coins, Clarion Books, 1999

To Dinner, For Dinner, Holiday House, 2000

Subira Subira, Clarion Books, 2000

The Orphan Boy, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2007; Oxford University Press, 1990; Clarion Books, 1991

Drama

The Flying Tortoise, Fringe Theatre Adventures Company of Edmonton, 1999

Visit of the Sea Queen, Children-in-Dance Company of Calgary, 2000

The Twins and the Monster, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, performed annually since 2001

A Promise to the Sun, Concrete Theatre of Edmonton, 2005

began teaching theatre and literature in a teachers' college, despite having no formal teacher training. After going back to university to become a teaching assistant, Tololwa realized that, in spite of his grandfather's wishes, he didn't want to teach. He followed the suggestion of a Canadian professor he met at university and left Tanzania to go to the University of Alberta to obtain his MA in theatre.

After completing his MA program he left Canada and returned to Tanzania. Shortly after returning home he became a member of a theatre group that specialized in original plays. However, it wasn't his plays that got noticed first.

By now, he was married and had 2 young children. He liked to read to them but there was a very narrow range of material from which to choose. As he had done before, he wrote his own stories. After creating a number of stories, he realized he needed to get into a writing workshop. In Tanzania, competition was fierce for the few workshops available. He wrote the required story for the workshop entrance and was accepted. It wasn't long before his picture books began to be published.

Tololwa draws from folk tales, "the ones that have something for me, a lot of images and memories of growing up in Tanzania that I can make my own story out of." His own personal experience also plays a part: "Even when I work on folk tales, bits and pieces of my own life find their way into them."

Of a writing routine he says, "I would like a routine but I don't really have one. My life has always been in transition." When his boys were young he wrote in stolen minutes. "Sometimes it was easy if the story had taken shape. It was really easy to become focused on it ..." Now that his children are grown, his time is taken up with school visits, freelance work and work on his Ph.D. Nevertheless, the work gets done because he "Heeds the call of the story."

Awards

- Governor General's Award, 1991
- Notable Children's Book in the Language Arts, 1992
- Amelia Howard-Gibbon Award, 1992
- Elizabeth Cleaver Award, 1992
- Parents Choice Storybook Award, 1992
- Notable Children's Trade book in the Field of Social Studies, 1994
- Canadian Library Association Honor Book, 1996
- R. Ross Annett Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1996, 1999
- Children's Africana Award, African Studies Association, 2000
- ALA Notable Book, 2000
- Coretta Scott King Honor Book, 2001
- Our Choice Award, Canadian Children's Book Centre (10 times)
- Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People, 2001
- Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Gold Book Award, 2001

Short-listed

- Georgia Reading Association Award, 1992
- California Children's Media Award, 1993
- Silver Birch Award, Ontario, 1995
- Bill Martin, Jr. Award, Kansas Reading Association, 2001

Tololwa may well heed the call of the story but so have others, with his stories having been published in the United States, Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Denmark. In South Africa, his work has been translated into Zulu, Xhosa, Setswana and Afrikaans.

Currently, he is working on a play which is part of his Ph.D., focusing on Folk Tales and Theatre, to be produced by Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. He is also writing another children's story with God as one of the characters.

When it comes to revision and deciding what works, Tololwa says, "I can psych myself out with 'gee this isn't working – is anybody going to like it?'" As a result, "With picture books ... I can easily lose count of the number of revisions." With his plays he says it is a bit different. There is usually a deadline which must be met. Even so, he usually does at least five revisions.

The revision process involves "Taking a vacation from it and then coming back to it. I keep doing that for as long as I can and then one day I reach a point of diminishing returns... ." At this point he is pretty sure the piece is finished: "I know it is finished when I no longer think about it." He doesn't get help by belonging to a critiquing group, although he thinks such groups are a good idea: "One of the things I like about writing plays is that you get feedback from the workshop situation." He will sometimes take new work into a school and try it out on the children, "to get a sense of what works and what doesn't." The ultimate determination of when a piece is finished is when the editor says "Give it to me."

Although he may not belong to critiquing groups or have specific people he shows his work to, that isn't to say he doesn't have mentors. The author of any book that he admires is a mentor to him. Equally, he considers his colleagues to be mentors. In turn, he has been a mentor to the students in the classes he has visited. "I value it very very much. I always try to find ways in which to be worthy of the trust."

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Young Alberta Book Society
- The Writers Union of Canada
- T.A.L.E.S
- Young Alberta Book Society

Whether or not he belongs to critiquing groups or has mentors, Tololwa creates magic for his readers. His bibliography is long and his list of honours is impressive. In spite of receiving many awards, Tololwa doesn't incorporate them into any definition of personal success. He says, "I think that awards are great when they happen – it isn't something that I think about when I write stories." Defining success for him is being able to do the kind of writing he wants to do.

That kind of writing is to tell stories. That is one role of the writer in the greater community: storyteller. "I think one role is to be a facilitator." That is, to help people get their own stories out to the world. A second role is that of reflector – one who takes the time to reflect upon the issues of the day and then write about them.

There are some issues, like censorship, that he doesn't let get in the way of what he wants to do. "I think censorship is self-defeating because people will read what they want to read." Luckily, Tololwa has not experienced the censor's red pen. He says, "I am against censorship..." However, when considering children, he says, "I think of necessity we must consider the age appropriateness of certain things."

Tololwa will continue to be a storyteller, a facilitator, a reflector. He continues to hold a clear idea of his audience and the kind of stories they want to read. When he looks to the future, however, he says, "I would like to enter a different phase. I want to go beyond what I've done." Regardless of what he decides to do, he returns to the memory of his grandfather: "When I do something, I think, is this something I could explain to my grandfather – that I am really being useful on this earth."

Written March 2007

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Sarah Murphy

"I helped organize the march on Washington, DC, when Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous, 'I have a dream' speech. I always joke about it, because when he was giving his speech, I was having a dream too. I was asleep under a tree after having been up for 48 hours getting the buses out of New York," says Sarah Murphy.

Being a social activist has been part of Sarah's life since she was 14. The daughter of a Native American father of the Choctaw Nation and a white mother, she grew up in Brooklyn, New York during the 1960s: a time and place to form beliefs that have continued to affect her way of life and her work.

Another significant influence was her "dislocated family." Her mother was largely incapacitated by alcohol by the time Sarah was six and worked sporadically for Time Inc. and freelanced after that. Her father was a merchant seaman and away from home for long periods of time. Despite her family difficulties, "Everybody thought that I should stay in New York City because of the connection with the literary community through my mother. You are simply programmed to enter that world. It's not a world I like very much." In the end, all of this fuelled Sarah's desire to get away as soon as she could.

While she lived in New York she attended one of the city's most progressive schools for elementary school and she loved it. "I consider it a very important and positive influence in my life." For high school she attended one of the city's most exclusive all girl schools on a scholarship. "I hated it."

Website

www.wordhoard.co.uk

Bibliography

Fiction

The Measure of Miranda, NeWest Press, 1987

Comic Book Heroine and Other Stories, NeWest Press, 1990

The Deconstruction of Wesley Smithson, Mercury Press, 1992

Connie Many Stories, Mercury Press, 1996

Lilac in Leather: A Tale of Forsythia, Bedbugs, Faded Cotton and Time, Pedlar Press, 1999

The Forgotten Voices of Jane Dark, Pedlar Press, 2003

Multimedia

die tinkerbelle die, Spout Publications, 2002

Audio

When Bill Danced the War, CD, The Word Hoard, Huddersfield, 2007

Forthcoming

Last Taxi to Nutmeg Mews, Pedlar Press, 2009 [NEW]

She applied to the University of Chicago under an early admissions program, was accepted, and spent two years there on a National Merit scholarship. Although she left without finishing, the experience “sprung me into this thing of going elsewhere.” However, she did return to New York, where she began organizing against the war in Viet Nam; she also decided to attend the Parson’s School of Design. Her family were surprised at this choice because they thought she was destined to be an academic, a lawyer, or a politician.

Before finishing her course at Parson’s, she decided to travel to Mexico. There she finished her degree at the University of the Americas and studied at San Carlos, the art academy that is part of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Sarah got her degree in visual arts and in her final year won a prize for her painting.

In Mexico, she met Tom Proudlock, who became her husband, and moved to Toronto with him. There she continued to work in the visual art field, earning gallery representation for her artwork. During her first year of residence in Calgary she had a solo show at the Muttart Gallery and, virtually on a whim, decided to take three months off to try to write a novel.

Books had always been important in her home despite the fact that often there wasn’t much money. And while books were important, Sarah learned quickly they were not the only way a story could be told. “I never set out to be a writer. My feeling is that writing is something I grew into.” She may have grown into writing but storytelling is a natural for her. Her father, whose tradition was that of the storyteller, instilled in her the love of oral story-telling. Despite limited formal education, he knew a great deal of native history, which he told his children. “I knew all sorts of native history that nobody else knew,” Sarah recalls. “He bought me my first copy of the Popol Vuh, the Mayan creation story.” He also brought stories home from his travels around the world. Sarah credits her father with encouraging her to study the visual arts.

Awards

- Howard O'Hagan Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2003
- Arts Council England International Artists Fellowship, 2007
- Golden Beret Award, Calgary International Spoken Word Festival, 2008 **[NEW]**

Short-Listed

- Howard O'Hagan Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1990
- Howard O'Hagan Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1992
- George Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1996
- George Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1999

Membership

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers' Union of Canada

While living in Mexico, she'd fallen in love with the work of Julio Cortazar. "He has been the greatest influence on my writing. Something about his writing style and structure. The story as a circle. The story that comments on itself." As a beginning writer, the influence of Cortazar was so significant that Sarah thought she could write stories in a similar style. As she wrote, her story began to grow. "I should have noticed when I wrote it what was actually happening. I cannot write like Cortazar. What I learned is that I have to have a frame and then it just gets bigger and bigger and I have to bring it under control. By the time I had written 800 pages I had turned into a writer."

Sarah stopped doing her visual art work for the next 10 to 15 years to concentrate on her writing. Eventually, the question became, should she return to the visual art and forget about writing or should she try to do both? "I've gone back to the visual work again, illustrations of my own work and some installations or exhibitions but at a far less intense level than the writing. "It's hard enough to sustain one career in the arts, sustaining two careers in the arts is ridiculous." However, one art form does inform the other. "Even before I stopped the visual arts work I was starting to do very abstract stuff with small words and statements inside it. There was an influence toward writing in that. I think that I am very visual in my writing. What I put down, the fact of how things look and what the scene is, has as much importance as any other element of the story."

Her stories usually begin with a first line popping into her head. From that first line a voice is generated and from that voice comes the story. This same process happens whether she is writing fiction or non-fiction. "Somewhere between Cortazar and telling the stories of my life I encountered a relationship with narrative. That's what I do. Things explode for me and when they explode then everything connects to everything else. Bringing that under control is a horrible task. But, I know now that I have the ability to bring them back under control. There is a moment when the story assumes a shape. I know I can write it."

There is a security in getting to the point where she knows she can write the stories she wants to tell. "I'm not somebody who thinks that you have to write every day. I do believe you have to establish enough discipline to know that you can do what you set out to do." Sarah will usually set up her work a day ahead of time. With the plan established, she gets up early, relaxes for a while, and then sits down at the computer. Once she gets started she will write for 30-45 minutes and then take a break. There are times when she will write as much as 2000 words in a good day and then not write at all the next day. "Those periods of letting things settle out are very important." This method may not work for everyone, however—Sarah acknowledges that this kind of routine works only after one has been writing long enough to know that no matter how long between writing days, one can go back and finish the project. Although she feels that one can get a bit too caught up in a writing routine, she is also aware that writers often face a huge temptation to create work for themselves that will interfere with the creative work. "I will write before I do housework. Sometimes it's my environment or my creative work. Until my environment starts to drive me crazy I will keep up with my creative work."

There are not a lot of things that Sarah is willing to put ahead of her creative work but her personal relationships are some of them. "I think putting creative work ahead to the point of neglecting relationships is one of the old art world myths." And when those relationships are family ones, "I think the difficulty with the family and the creative process isn't around the creative process, it's around the shepherding of the creative process." That is, weaving the writing time and the family time together. As well as family time, she feels that one must also make time for the "schmoozing" with friends and colleagues. "That's the hard part. If you don't have a discipline established you won't ever finish anything and without finishing anything you don't believe you can and then you don't start."

And knowing when a piece is finished is a tricky thing. "The performance monologues I never know and I just declare them finished. There is al-

ways the potential for infinite rewrites where if you change the beginning it changes the ending and if you change the ending it changes the beginning. You can do that forever. At some point you have to know to simply say stop." On the other hand, with the rest of her writing there is a sense that when it's sent out it's finished. It has a specific shape and it has said what she wants it to say. In general there are four or five revisions. There are two drafts after the initial writing that are "adding" drafts. The next draft will be used to get everything into position. And then there is the cutting draft where she cuts away extraneous material. Then there may be one more draft. Of all of the drafts that need to be done, "The getting-things-into-position draft is the single most important."

Sarah has never used critiquing groups as part of her writing or revision process, partly because she has always had friends to whom she could send her material and solicit reactions. Unfortunately, those people have moved and now she feels that a group could be a great deal of help, especially with the performance pieces. For all writers and for beginning writers in particular she says the single most important thing is to have readers. But she cautions, "It's important for writers to pick their readers well. Pick people who know and understand where you are coming from. The biggest thing is to have the person who is reading for you help you find the best possible voice. There are no hard and fast rules. One of the problems with creative writing programs is that they become far too rule-based."

Rules or no rules, writing is still as exciting for Sarah now as it was when she spent those three months attempting to write that first novel. "The only thing that I think is lost, and I think I feel good about, is that when I first started writing it was like a miracle. The sense that it's a miracle that I can actually write is no longer there. Sometimes, I will get overwhelmed with the process and then say to myself, 'I don't know what the hell I'm doing. Who told you to do this?'" In spite of these self-doubts, Sarah says that she soon realized that she would far rather be writing than doing

anything else. "Now I have the confidence and the competence to solve the problems I set for myself. I know, if I want to tell this story, it's tellable. I can find a form that will let it be what it wants to be. It's the marriage of form and content."

Writing may still be exciting but rejection is always lurking in the background. "Rejection is always difficult. It's one of the terrible things in the arts. One of the rules is somebody out there is going to hate you. It doesn't matter who you are." The way to deal with rejection in her mind is to not send material to people she knows are going to hate it. "You have to have some insight into what you are doing that allows you to have some idea who you are going to resonate with." One of the hardest things for a writer to do in Sarah's opinion is to develop that distance from your own work which allows you to judge what somebody is right about and what they may be wrong about. In other words, "knowing what is legitimate criticism." It's the difference between somebody saying that you didn't achieve your intention and somebody saying, "I wish you had done something else."

If dealing with rejection is personal for Sarah, so is success, "My sense of success is that I can do this and it will work. My success is that I have been able to publish what I consider to be finished, that represents what I have wanted to say. The idea for me is to find a way to say what I needed to say in a way that satisfies me. That's not to say that I write for myself ? I don't. But, I do write what I believe I need to say to the world."

In this self-definition of success there is little room for the notion that awards play any part in her idea of success. "Excellence is in the eye of the beholder. As a writer, I think that awards should not count for you as a measure of achievement. At any given moment any given group of writers are going to have very, very different ideas of what is best." Although she doesn't see awards as being part of the definition of success, that doesn't mean Sarah thinks there is no role for them to play. "They are very useful in that they concentrate the attention of readers not only around

the winners but the short list for the awards and the process of writing. In a sense they are advertising.”

Working to say what needs to be said and getting that out into the greater community is an important role for the writer, in Sarah’s mind. “I take very seriously the idea of the writer as someone who puts together the ideas arising out of his or her community. Not just bearing witness but asserting ideas in a way that can change things. I believe in the social novel.”

Novels that deal with social issues have sometimes come under harsh criticism, even censorship. Sarah says that as far as she is concerned there is no role for censorship in the community. “The minute you say that, there will be somebody who says, do you let somebody yell fire in a crowded theatre. That is a very situational thing and not writing.” And when it comes to the issue of children, “There are people who will get into the age thing. You have to watch the exploitation of children. That’s a different question. I would not necessarily base my entire political judgment of a group or an administration on not having censorship but no, I don’t believe in censorship.”

There are issues that Sarah still needs to explore. “I have two novels and a memoir piece that I am working on now and far too many ideas for more. So, I hope not only for the next five years but for the next quarter century to just keep on keeping on. I will work mostly on books but there will be shorter pieces too. And I hope to keep on with the performance work, both writing it and performing it. I have no idea where that will all take me.”

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.buschekbooks.com

Michael Penny

Michael was born in Australia and came to Canada with his parents when he was 15. He completed his final two years of high school in Edmonton. He remembers his parents as being “huge readers” who encouraged his own reading habits with books such as *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson and various books by Charles Dickens. Later he was reading the James Bond novels as they came out and “thinking they were incredibly racy.”

By the time his father had accepted a job in New Zealand, Michael had met the woman who would become his wife and decided that Canada was where he wanted to live. He studied English at the University of Alberta and then got a Master of Arts degree at the University of New Mexico. His thesis was done in Creative Writing and was published as a chapbook in the 1970s. Jobs in academia being scarce when he graduated, Michael returned to university and entered law school. He now practises law in Edmonton.

Writing is something Michael has always done. “I figured out at 13, 14, or 15 years of age that I was interested in writing.” While at high school he had two incredible English teachers, Agnes Lynass and Lee Phipps, who were the “first two adults I ran into who thought that writing was a serious thing to do as opposed to a hobby or just something to amuse yourself with.” Except for a hiatus while in law school, “I can’t imagine not writing, it is part of the way of living.”

Writing may have been an early interest, but sending material out to be

Bibliography

Poetry

Bear, Bard Press, Albuquerque, 1976 (chapbook)

Completing the Kora, La So So La Press, 2006

My Chimera, BuschekBooks, 2006

Awards

- *Edmonton Journal* Poetry Prize, 1972

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- League of Canadian Poets
- Edmonton Arts Council
- Canadian Conference of the Arts

published came much later. While an undergraduate, Michael was asked by Sheila Watson, his honours thesis supervisor, to submit a poem to *White Pelican*, a magazine that she and several other professors at the University of Alberta were both editing and financing. The poem was published. "With the arrogance of being 18 or 19, I thought that was the usual thing." It wasn't until graduate school that Michael began to send poems out in earnest.

Finding the time to write is not always easy. Michael prefers to write in the early morning before he goes to work. "You know I could never be a novelist because my day job is a six-day-a-week 60-hour job. I need a genre where 30 minutes is a useful chunk of time." That's why he writes poetry. With a half hour here and an hour there, he has always managed to make the time to get a poem written. Michael's work means a lot of travel and he often writes while in his hotel room. It is because he has gotten good at making that half hour here or an hour there count, that he continues to have success in publishing in journals – he can always make time to get a journal submission together. Perhaps it is for this reason that he replies, "Writing poetry is my real job; practising law is the hobby for money," when asked what his real job is. Michael says, "I have a home office, a place to write and I make sure I spend time there. You have to make time, make choices." Michael's family has always understood that writing was not a hobby. They support him with his writing.

"You have to look at every word and make every word justify itself." That sums up Michael's attitude about revision. If there is one important point to be made about revision it is that one has to be honest with oneself. "We all have these things that we think are nifty but then we find they don't fit in. You just have to be ruthless. I like the quote, 'It takes a good writer to get rid of a bad line, but it takes a great writer to get rid of a good line.'" Although revision is never really finished in his mind, he does finish his poems. "It is usually when I am either bored with them or I've started to go back over something I've already reworked that I stop working on

them.”

Michael was a member of a writing group for a number of years. “I can tell you that I belonged to a pretty remarkable group of very accomplished writers.” The group critiqued both individual poems and a couple of manuscripts. Michael feels that writing groups are a good idea. “I would join another writing group if for no other reason than it is wonderful to spend an afternoon with people who agree with you as to the value of, not just your own work, but everybody’s.”

While poetry is what he prefers to write, Michael also has written academic legal papers and articles for various journals on legal matters. In fact, he has come to the conclusion that it is not good enough to be a good writer when working in his chosen genre, but that it matters at least as much when working as a lawyer. He makes a concerted effort to make his legal writing as clear as he can. He says, “There is a real moral component to good writing. If the writing is clear then we know what the author intended and there is no chance for subterfuge.”

Writing poetry has gotten both harder and easier. It is harder in the sense that “I have a better idea of what can be done.” It is easier because “As you get more experience you develop routines and attitudes that make it easier to sit at your desk and do it. You develop a sort of realistic sense of what acceptance means and what rejection means. I think most writers overestimate what a bad thing rejection is and what a good thing acceptance is. I think every writer has had the experience of having their book published and being amazed that people aren’t stopping them in the street and complimenting them on their work. So, what you learn is that neither rejection nor acceptance are quite as important as you thought they were when you were a younger writer. Which brings you back to what you should be doing – writing.”

And writing is what defines success for Michael. “Success is getting the pages down. I would regard myself as unsuccessful if I went a week with-

out writing something no matter how poor." There are times, Michael says, when the week is magical. He will have five or six days in a row when every morning a poem is created. He acknowledges that it may nor may not be very good but it is there. "That's magical to me. That's success."

Michael is the first to acknowledge that he has had some help along the way. "I've had some great mentors: Sheila Watson, Bert Almon, Doug Barbour." There were also some of the instructors who taught in New Mexico. "These were my face-to-face mentors and then I have many writers who are mentors in the sense that they are encouraging and accepting, and that's good. I think everybody has something to teach you." And the mentoring role is one with which he is also familiar. As a member of the Board of NeWest Press, it was his job to read manuscripts in the selection process. "I try never to send a manuscript back without a page of comments that might be useful to the author. Every so often I'll get a manuscript, especially from a young poet, and I'll think 'Boy this person is really close but they just need...' and I've commented poem by poem. Mentoring is very important in any activity which is otherwise completed alone. You have to be prepared to teach and to help."

There is a definite role for the writer in the community at large, Michael believes: "To explain the community to itself both now and for posterity." Michael suggests that if Socrates thought that an unexamined life might not be worth living, then why wouldn't the same apply to writers and the community in which they live. In other words, it is not worth being a member of an unexamined community. "Writers can do that [examine the community], artists in general can do that in a more objective and honest way than can people who only have a financial or political stake in their community."

Michael is cautious when discussing the community issue of censorship. "Censorship is a very difficult issue because self-censorship is usually well motivated. The old line about free speech being okay but you can't shout fire in a crowded theatre, or art that is motivated by hatred or intolerance,

are cases in point. So yes, I think it has a role to play, but my goodness, it is a very blunt instrument and has to be used very, very carefully. I used to be a total libertarian on these issues but I think that times have changed and you can see what some of these things can do to bystanders."

Michael has a couple of pieces of advice for the beginning writer. "The first piece is: 'Don't.' Then, if the person goes ahead and does it anyway, then I'll know they were meant to be a writer." The second is: "Become a stamp collector. You are going to get a lot of self-addressed, stamped envelopes back. If you say to yourself, oh another one for my collection, then you are taking the right approach." He also cautions that the experience of getting his book of poetry published taught him that a collection of poems is not necessarily a book. "If you want book publication, you have to think about writing books rather than writing just individual poems, and that is a bit of a tough transition. It's like deleting a good line – sometimes in order to put a book together you have to ignore some really good poems."

Of his own work, he says he expects to keep on writing. His goals have changed slightly in the last five years. "Five years ago I had a considerable number of periodical publications but never seemed able to get a book over the transom. Now that that has happened my goals are to keep on writing, keep on sending out."

Revised October 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Ken Rivard

Ken Rivard has always been held captive by the magic of writing. As a boy, he read books and imagined himself the hero or the villain. It was easy for him to turn the words on the page into pictures in his head. He read the regular classics such as *Moby Dick*, *Treasure Island*, and the *Hardy Boys* series. But he also read books that were not so accepted, books like *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. "I remember in high school, the teacher was trying to have us read *Macbeth* aloud and I was reading Edgar Allan Poe or O. Henry, bits of the banned books by Henry Miller or a James Bond with the book on my lap under my desk!"

The year Ken was in grade six two things happened: 1) He had a teacher whose abilities prompted him to decide that he would become a teacher when he grew up; and 2) That same teacher read a story Ken had written and told him that there was a distinct possibility that he would grow up to be a writer!

During his school years, Ken didn't do much writing over and above the minimum that the teachers required of him. But he must have been getting ready to be a writer because he spent a lot of his time reading. He had good models to follow at home: his father read biographies and his mother read Agatha Christie novels. Both his older sister and younger brother were also avid readers. "There was lots of active language modeling around my house even though there wasn't much money."

Around 1970 a friend who had just published a couple of poems in *Quarry* magazine encouraged Ken to begin writing seriously. As he puts it, "I

Bibliography

Poetry

Kiss Me Down to Size, Thistledown Press, 1983

Losing His Thirst, Pierian Press, 1985 (reissued 1986)

Frankie's Desires, Quarry Press, 1987

Fiction

Working Stiffs, Greensleeve Publishing, 1990

If She Could Take All These Men, Beach Holme Publishing, 1995

Skin Tests, Black Moss Press, 2000

Bottle Talk, Black Moss Press, 2002

Whiskey Eyes, Black Moss Press, 2004

Missionary Positions, Black Moss, 2008

Children's Fiction

Mom, The School Flooded, Annick Press, 1996.

Mom, The School Flooded, Annick Press, 2007, Revised/
Reissued

Forthcoming

The Trouble with Uncle Kevin, Calgary Communities
Against Sexual Assault, 2008

Mom, The School Flooded, Gibburi (South Korea), 2010

[NEW]

started playing with words."The more he wrote and the more he read, the more he became convinced that this was where the magic really was. At first, the writing was often cathartic. Now, he says, "I write because I must write, it is part of who I am". And while the writing can still be cathartic at times, it is more often driven by Ken's curiosity about people and the things that they do or don't do. It is his way of bringing a sense of order to the world around him. "It keeps me alive inside."

Ken's first writing experiences resulted in poems. The more he wrote the more the poems came. He began sending his work out to magazines that published poetry. "I remember one small publication called *Alive Magazine*. They published a whole bunch of my poems and short fiction in the early to mid-1970s. Boy, did that ever encourage me to write more!" Perhaps stimulated by these early successes, Ken wrote a complete manuscript (about seventy poems) as his Masters thesis at McGill University. Later, he got his work published in other magazines such as *The Malahat Review*, *Canadian Literature*, *Antigonish Review*, *Capilano Review*, *Event*, *Dandelion*, and *Prism*, and read on CBC radio both provincially and nationally. As of 2007, he has two books of poetry published. After the second book he began to explore other genres, beginning with prose poems and moving on to postcard fiction and finally settling (more or less) on short fiction. He now has four books of short fiction published. However, he has also explored the possibilities of writing picture books for children. He has one picture book published, which will be re-issued with new illustrations in 2007.

Ken has always had a strict writing routine. When he was teaching and when his children were young, the routine was that Saturday mornings were his writing time. His family, always supportive of his writing, simply didn't bother him from the time he got up until lunchtime. Since he's retired and his children have grown, he has been able to spread his routine out over the week. He writes for up to five hours most days. (The major disruption to his schedule is some part-time teaching that he enjoys do-

Awards

Short-listed

- Howard O'Hagan Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1996, 2001, 2003, 2005
- W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Prize, City of Calgary, 2001

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- The Writers Union of Canada

ing). The writing allotment may be increased if he is close to finishing a project. The rest of the time is devoted to the family business of day-to-day living.

While he is working, Ken does both editing and creating new pieces. "I think I prefer working on new material because it is exciting – like looking over a cliff." If he comes to a point where he needs to think about a passage or scene, going outside to shovel snow or getting out the ironing board and ironing a shirt sometimes provides the break from his writing that he needs.

When revising, he will rework a piece six to 10 times or more. "If I tried to send in an early draft to a magazine or publisher (as I used to do) I'd be ignored. Editors know lazy writing when they see it..." Nevertheless, the question of when a piece is finished is a bit open-ended. "I know a piece is finished when I have revised, revised, revised and I need another pair of eyes to look at it." He has been a member of several critiquing groups over the years, and thinks that such groups are worthwhile. The most recent writing group that he has been a member of is an electronic "writers circle" co-ordinated by The Writers Union of Canada. In the end he says, "I'm not sure if a writing piece is ever finished."

The fact that he does write in more than one genre is a positive thing in Ken's mind. "It keeps me open-minded and willing to learn. It helps keep my writing more agile."

Even with the number of books that Ken has published, he says that writing hasn't gotten any easier. Perhaps, it has made him better at editing his own work. Perhaps, it has given him a better understanding of his own voice. Nevertheless, "Writing to me is eighty-five percent stamina, it always has been. It is hard work, but it is so satisfying." In fact, Ken says that writing has gotten harder because he expects so much more from his work.

Getting that “more” and thereby finding success can be elusive. “To be honest, I’m not sure what ‘successful’ means. It is so exhilarating to get something accepted. It means that somebody out there thinks my writing is worth reading and I’m honoured by that.” In spite of having been an awards juror for provincial competitions in both Alberta and Saskatchewan, awards don’t seem to factor into the definition of success. “I’d be lying if I said that awards don’t mean anything to me because they are a form of recognition by my peers... [but] I write mostly because of what it does for me. It’s vital.” After some consideration he says, “I know I’ve been successful if I’m true to myself and if some of my writing touches readers, especially emotionally. And besides, flattery is something you taste but don’t swallow.”

In spite of the success Ken has had, he still receives rejections of work from time to time. When he was just starting out he says, “My bottom lip would drag along the carpet but then I met writers like W.P. Kinsella who reminded me that writing is 85% stamina – stay at it and don’t give up!” And if the rejection comes with a letter, “I follow through with each of the suggestions and more. Then I send it back to the same publisher. It seems that many publishers like the persistence.”

Having a mentor is often one way of getting help in determining whether or not a piece of writing is successful, in dealing with concerns that arise from the business of writing, and in dealing with issues like rejection. Ken has had mentors. “Authors such as W.P. Kinsella, Tom Wayman, and Byrna Barclay and others have provided sound mentorship for me.” And Ken has been a mentor to others many times in his life. Considering his years as a teacher, perhaps the role is a natural fit. “It seems every year I’ve been a mentor for some writer in one form or another.” Ken has edited at least three books for other writers and at one time co-ordinated the Writers Guild of Alberta’s Manuscript Reading Service. Ken’s mentorship continues in the form of part-time teaching at Mount Royal, giving writing workshops to all age levels of student and fulfilling the role of Writer-

in-Residence for both the Calgary Public Library and the Writers Guild of Alberta. Recently, he was asked to give readings at a number of venues across Canada including Authors at Harbourfront and Seneca College in Toronto.

With a position such as Writer-in-Residence comes a greater opportunity for fulfilling a particular role within the community at large. Ken says that the role of the writer is to be an integral part of society's culture. Perhaps, the Writer-in-Residence programs run by organizations such as public libraries are partial fulfillment of that role. "The writer is a walking-talking literacy model. Words and ideas have meaning and value for the writer and it's vital that society sees this." Earlier in his career, Ken also bridged the space between the writing world and the general community by running a reading series in Calgary.

Bridging that space can become difficult when it comes to issues such as censorship. "Censorship is such a personal taste and an emotionally explosive issue that it's sometimes hard to even discuss it rationally." In spite of that, Ken sees a place for censorship as long as it "can be applied sensibly to such issues as children and pornography." In the end, however, "lots of times I think censorship is a hammer used by those who are afraid of a piece of writing."

Regardless of the issues which may come, Ken wants to continue reaching out to his readers through his writing. He expects more from his own writing and he wants to see others push themselves to higher levels in writing too. "Don't just talk about writing, don't give up and don't let anybody discourage you. It is too easy to go do something else."

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Photo Credit: Geoff McMaster

Websites

www.gailsidoniesobat.com

www.spottedcowpress.ca

www.greatplains.mb.ca

www.sumachpress.com

Gail Sidonie Sobat

It's seven in the evening, the temperature is in the high 20s and she's put in a day's work, including a five-hour drive, but Gail Sidonie Sobat gives out big smiles and welcoming hugs to the writer/instructors arriving for a meeting prior to the start of another Writers Guild of Alberta YouthWrite camp for students ages 12 to 18. It's hard to tell that she has just arrived at camp, has not unpacked and will not see her bed until well after midnight! The writer/campers will arrive in the morning at seven. Gail will be there to greet them. She has been the co-ordinator for the camp since its inception in 1996. She listens, laughs, teases, cajoles, and defuses her way through the minefield of student and instructor demands without ever getting distracted from her goal: to ensure that the students learn as much as they can about writing and that both students and instructors have the best time they possibly can. Gail says, "I know I am not always going to be at the head of the camp, but I have a vision for it. I want it to become so popular that other provinces pick up the idea." Gail is the first to say she doesn't do it all on her own. She has assembled a dynamite team of young people to work with her at the camps.

Gail has lived in a number of communities around Alberta, eventually ending up in Edmonton, where she earned a BEd, a BA, and a MA in English at the University of Alberta. Her teaching career began in St. Albert, Alberta. In short order she found herself off on an exotic, wonderful and terrifying adventure as a teacher in Istanbul, Turkey. Her contract, however, along with those of all the other foreign teachers at that school, was abruptly cancelled, so she returned to Canada, first to Powell River, British

Bibliography

Fiction (Adult)

The Book of Mary, Sumach Press, 2006

Fiction (Young Adult)

Ingamald, Spotted Cow Press, 2001

A Winter's Tale, Great Plains Publications, 2004

A Glass Darkly, Great Plains Publications, 2006

Forthcoming

Gravity Journal, Great Plains Publications, 2008

Poetry

Aortic Caprice, River Books, 2003/2004

Non-Fiction/Academic

"If the Ghost Be There, Then Am I Crazy?: An Examination of Ghosts in Virginia Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers*, Brother Rush and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (Winter 1995-1996), 20:4:168-74.

"The Night in Her Own Country: The Heroine's Quest for Self in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Tombs of Atuan*." *Mythlore* 81 (1996): 24-32.

Columbia, then home to Edmonton, where she was seconded to the University of Alberta as a Field Experience Associate. Two years later she became a teacher at the Amiskwaciy Academy, western Canada's first urban aboriginal high school. She then took a short hiatus from teaching, but soon returned to the profession, joining the University of Alberta Hospital School, where she still teaches. She is also Adjunct Professor in Secondary Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta.

Gail's writing career began in Grade 3, when her teacher, Mrs. Leskiw, made her feel like a real writer. Gail had written a story as an assignment and her teacher telephoned Gail's mother to tell her that the writing Gail had completed was more sophisticated than that done by most Grade 9 students. "With that phone call, Mrs. Leskiw dubbed me a writer, and that stayed in my consciousness throughout my school years and into adulthood." Her career got another boost from a high school teacher, Duane Stewart, who taught her about editing and avoiding "adolescent angst." She considers Duane Stewart one of her mentors. "He is still my friend and he has read everything I've written, even my angst-filled poetry of my adolescence. He stuck with me and encouraged me."

Another mentor is Carolyn Pogue. "She has been the example in the world I would like to better emulate.... She and her husband, Bill Phipps, they are guiding lights in my world." Finally, Gail says, her mother is and always has been a mentor to her.

Having mentors is one thing, but being a mentor is quite another. In her position as a teacher, Gail performs this role almost by definition. "I take it very seriously. I had kind and compassionate readers and listeners. That's what I hope I give back." As one part of her mentoring role, she is the Canadian Author Association's Writer-in-Residence at the University of Alberta Bookstore for 2007-2008.

For Gail, ideas for poems and stories come from a wide range of sources. Paraphrasing Henry Miller, she says, "You cultivate an interest in things

Awards

- Hope Writers' Guild Poetry Contest (First Prize), 1993.
- English Language Arts Council Award, 2000.
- Arts Award for Career Development, Alberta Heritage Scholarship, 2002.
- Canadian Children's Book Centre Choice Award, 2004.
- Canadian Children's Book Centre Choice Award, 2005.
- Ontario Library Association's White Pine Award (nomination), 2005.
- Independent Publisher Book Award (IPPY) GOLD, 2007.
- Canadian Children's Book Centre Choice Award, 2007.

Short-Listed

- Governor General's Award for Excellence in Teaching, Co-recipient, 1996.

other than yourself so that you look at the amazing world around you and the amazing people around you, both in their horrors and their beauty, and you look up from your own life and there are stories everywhere. One of my friends had a journalism professor who said, 'I can go to anybody on the street and find a million stories.' I think that's very true."

Although she did attend a writing course taught by Gloria Sawai through the Department of Extension at the University of Alberta, for the most part Gail has learned through reading and modelling other writers. Certainly her career does not seem to have suffered for not having taken numerous writing courses – she has been writing and publishing poetry, fiction and non-fiction since 1985. When the opportunity and the time permit, she would like to take a writing course at the Banff Centre.

"When it's published and you can't do anything about it," she laughingly says about how she knows when a piece is finished. Then seriously, "I guess you come to that place where you feel this is ready to at least send out. It doesn't mean that I am egotistical or arrogant enough to think that that is the end of the process. Somebody else will have better eyes and better inner ears for the language and I really value those editors who help and guide the editing and revision process."

A writing routine is something that Gail wishes she could establish. "When I have a deadline, I have a routine. I wish I had the luxury of getting up and writing every day." In general, she will find "pockets of time in my day or in my weekend." When there is a deadline, however, then she will block off time during the day, such as a series of mornings when she will write. Often the thing that interrupts her writing schedule will be her dedication to her students. When she is concentrating on YouthWrite, for instance, she gets none of her own work done. That means she has to make the time to work on her own writing between August and March. "As long as I don't panic, I'm good with that. I'll find other times in the rhythm of life and in the rhythm of a whole year to concentrate on my own stuff."

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers' Union of Canada
- Young Alberta Books Society
- Canadian League of Poets
- Stroll of Poets Society
- Canadian Authors Association
- Canadian Children's Book Centre
- Alberta English and Language Arts Council
- Alberta Social Studies Council
- Canada's National History Society
- The Alberta Conference for Theatre
- Alberta Teacher's Association

In that rhythm of life both inside and out of the writer's life, there have been successes for Gail, although she is shy when talking about her accomplishments. She has published poetry, fiction both adult and Young Adult, and non-fiction; and has been both short-listed for and the recipient of awards for her writing. She was also short-listed as a co-recipient for a Governor-General's Award for teaching. Nevertheless, for Gail success is on two levels. The first is the "aha" moment that she comes across in a piece of her own writing after having let it sit for awhile. This is not arrogance but rather the realization that she has done what she wanted to do. The other comes from getting things published, especially her books. "Going on tour and meeting readers is an amazing, magical process because you work in isolation. It is very humbling and very moving to meet people who have read your work." As for that award—"Awards are illusive. They are nice but in the end it is who you are and what you do that really matters."

It is what writers do in and with the society in which they find themselves that matters to her. "I wish we lived in a country like Chile where Pablo Neruda is a national hero. I think that the things he wrote about, whether it was love or history or politics, shaped the national identity. If we were only permitted, and by permitted I mean given the space, the funding, the time, the opportunity, our poets and writers could help shape our national identity. If we don't tell our stories, who is going to tell them? I think for cultural preservation, for preservation of identity, the writers, the poets have a huge responsibility despite the nay-sayers who claim those things don't matter. I think they're vital."

Telling society's stories can sometimes bring the writer up against forces that society does not want to accept. There are those who want to block the telling of some stories. "Short of hate literature or child pornography, I am not a fan of censorship. I am of Voltaire's mind: 'I may not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.'"

Gail is going to continue telling stories, her own and those she sees

around her. "I would like to have more time to write. That would mean I would be freed up from the necessity of having to have too many jobs. I have an adult novel I want to write but I have to travel to write it." In the meantime she has a new Young Adult novel coming out. "I also have a manuscript of poetry and short stories and two more novels I would like to see published. And she has a very special ambition: "I want to complete this novel that is percolating away, if I could just find the first line. Dickens stole my first line."

Written January 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.frontenachouse.com

About Bob Stallworthy

Bob Stallworthy was a social worker prior to becoming a writer 21 years ago.

As well as publishing his poetry in magazines and anthologies across Canada, Bob has written three full-length books of poetry: *Under The Sky Speaking*, Snowapple Press, 1998; *From a Call Box*, Frontenac House Ltd., 2001; and *Optics*, Frontenac House Ltd., 2004. His work has been read on both CBC Radio 1 (Alberta Anthology) and CBC Radio 2, *Out of the Blue* (FM). He performed his work at the first Spoken Word International Writers Festival in Calgary in August 2004.

He has written book reviews for the Calgary Herald. He wrote the Teachers' Resource Guide for the first, second and third PanCanadian WordFest: Banff-Calgary International Writers Festivals. He has been the Book Columnist for the CBC *HomeStretch* and *EyeOpener* and one of two poetry editors for *Dandelion Magazine*.

He has been active in the Alberta writing community in numerous roles: a member of the Executive of the Canadian Authors Association/Calgary Branch; Book Display Co-ordinator and the first Calgary Region Co-ordinator for the Writers Guild of Alberta; a member of the Literary Arts Festival Committee, 1988 Winter Olympics; a founding member of the Calgary Writers Alliance; a member of the first Steering Committee for the Calgary Professional Arts Alliance; and for the first PanCanadian WordFest: Banff-Calgary International Writers Festival. He has sat on juries for the Canada Council, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and for the CBC. For

five years he was co-chair of the Calgary Freedom To Read Week Committee.

Bob has given readings in Sackville, NB, Halifax, NS and Toronto ON and over 150 readings and workshops around Alberta. For six years he was the visiting writer in 20 Calgary Catholic Junior/Senior High schools per year under the District Authors' Tour program. He was Writer-in-Residence at Drumheller Public Library in February 2005.

Optics was short-listed for the W.O. Mitchell/City of Calgary Book Prize in 2004. Bob is a co-recipient of the 2002 Calgary Freedom of Expression Award.

He is a full member of the League of Canadian Poets and a Lifetime member of the Writers Guild of Alberta.

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Photo Credit: Greg Gerrard

Fred Stenson

"When I was 14, my oldest sister sent me Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, thinking I needed it, and I did. The discovery of the depth of identification possible in fiction, also the discovery of one's anguished self in the character of another, started an infatuation with fiction that soon led to an attempt to write," says Fred Stenson.

The idea that Fred wanted to be a writer couldn't have been much of a shock to his parents or his siblings. "I freely expressed my determination to be a writer for my living. I'm glad that I did not feel the embarrassment about that declaration that I feel now, remembering it. Only once in my home did anyone say, 'Who do you think you are?' and the question felt irrelevant. It didn't feel any different to me than someone saying, 'I want to be a teacher.' I wasn't sure how the career aspect would work, but that was equally so of every trade and profession."

Raised on a mixed farm (winter wheat, pigs and Hereford cattle) located approximately halfway between Pincher Creek, Alberta and Waterton Lakes National Park, his first three years of schooling took place in a one-room school house called New Yarrow. After that school closed he completed his pre-university schooling in Pincher Creek, graduating from St. Michael's High School. Fred attended the University of Calgary and graduated with a BA in Economics.

Books were always present in Fred's home. "Books were read as opposed to being venerated. Most of the new books arrived as presents for my father. Then my sister, Marie, began borrowing books from the Department

Bibliography

Fiction

Lonesome Hero, Macmillan of Canada, 1974;
republished Brindle and Glass, 2005

Last One Home, NeWest Press, 1988

Working Without A Laugh Track, Coteau Books, 1990

Teeth, Coteau Books, 1994

The Trade, Douglas & McIntyre, 2000

Lightning, Douglas & McIntyre, 2003

The Great Karoo, Doubleday Canada, 2008

Non-Fiction

Thing Feigned or Imagined, Banff Centre Press, 2002

Waterton: Brush and Pen, Fifth House, 2006

Film

Landscapes (series), ACCESS, 1984

Working Cowboy - In Search of a Cowboy Song, CFCN-TV, 1990

Land of Hope, White Iron Productions/ LaFete, 1995

Centennial Cattle Drive: 1896-1996, White Iron Productions, 1996

World of Horses (with John Scott, 26 episodes), White Iron Productions, 1998-1999

The Great March, White Iron Productions, Calgary and General Assembly Production Centre, Ottawa: for: History Television, 1999

Pay Dirt, (2 one-hour documentaries), Pay Dirt Productions Ltd., 2005

of Extension library at the University of Alberta." Other books around the house came from his English grandparents. But the event that he remembers as "cracking open the horizon containing literary fiction," was that copy of *Catcher in the Rye* from his sister.

Fred took his first steps toward writing while in high school. He sent out only one short story while he was in high school and can no longer remember to which magazine. While travelling in Europe after graduating from the University of Calgary he wrote his first novel. He submitted the manuscript to a competition run by Alberta's Department of Culture and was a finalist in the competition. The novel was published under the title *Lonesome Hero* by Macmillan of Canada in 1974. Fred was 22 years old. The world had a few more lessons in store for him. Flush with the success of his first novel he sent out more short stories and more novels. All came back rejected. "The rejections of short stories were always disappointing but in another sense routine. The rejections of my novels was a tortuous business, and I did not deal with it well. It was heartbreak, really, and although publishing a novel at so young an age was an advantage in many ways, the rejection of subsequent novels was the dark payback. I don't know if I ever learned to deal with this well. Eventually, however, my career resumed."

Fred has continued to write mainstream fiction throughout his career, and although he has tried his hand at both the thriller and the mystery, "I seemed to lack the particular drive for genre fiction." Because writing novels and short stories did not pay the bills, Fred became a freelance writer and that meant doing whatever writing he could find that would pay. He began by writing book reviews and magazine articles and then discovered film and video script writing. Film and video became the mainstay of his income for two decades. The fact that the topics for the video scripts were many and varied provided a knowledge base for his fiction. Luckily for him, Fred seems able to compartmentalize the projects he is working on at any given time. There were many times when he would be working

Awards

- Silver Medal for Fiction, Canadian Authors Association, 1975
- A.M.P.I.A Award for Best Non-Dramatic Script, 1984
- A.M.P.I.A. Award for Best Non-Dramatic Script, 1997
- City of Edmonton Book Prize, City of Edmonton, 2000
- George Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2000
- Grant MacEwan Author's Prize, 2000
- Grant MacEwan Author's Prize, 2003

Awards – Short-listed

- Giller Prize, 2000
- Governor General's Award, 2008
- Canadian-Caribbean Region, Commonwealth Literary Prize, 2009
- IMPAC Dublin Award, 2001, 2009, long-listed

on a number of projects at the same time. "I have more difficulty doing it now than when my freelance career was more complex. I think that it is because I am called on to do it less, and so am less able."

Whether he is writing fiction or video scripts, coming up with ideas is not difficult for Stenson. "I recently set out to think up a subject for a new novel. It was like opening a drawer and finding it full of them. There are so many worthy ideas. They come from everywhere in one's life, elaborated by imagination. If I have more ideas than I can deal with, I set them aside for later. Since the really important thing is the writing, the ideas are not that dear to me."

Even for someone who writes for a living (book reviews, 140 film and video scripts, columnist for the magazine *Alberta Views* and Director of the Wired Writing Studio at The Banff Centre) it can be tricky to balance work, home life and writing time schedules. "One of the things that I believe is that one must simply make time, isolate a portion of time. People who say they have no time to write still go to movies or various other kinds of entertainment, so the time usually exists in most lives; it's just being used for other things." For Fred, one of the ways to buy time away from his work has been through the system of grants available to writers. He sees these as enormously helpful to any writer. "The fact that a grant can buy time is of enormous psychological importance, especially if a writer has a young family and lots of financial demands." His fifteen books – seven fiction and eight non-fiction – are proof that Fred has found a way to get the writing done.

To accomplish this much work, the writer usually requires a routine. "My writing routine is nothing terribly interesting. I work at home in the early part of the day. When I lose momentum, or if I'm having trouble getting to my fiction because of other chores or demands, I move to a coffee shop and work there. I leave my computer at home as a rule and mess around with pen and paper. I like to use longhand for the first draft or two."

Revision is a constant part of the writing process for him. "The first step is getting whatever I'm writing into a readable first draft. Then, I try to stay away from it long enough to forget the work a bit, so that I can return to it as a reader. This is the time when it may have to be broken up and rebuilt. I guess the number of these drafts is usually three or four, though the material of any given page will have been worked more often than that."

Even with setting aside time to write and revise Fred acknowledges that there are occasions when he can still get stuck. "Being stuck is often not knowing the characters well enough to know what they will do, or not having thought enough about where the story will go next. The conflict is that one desires to write but doesn't know the story or the characters well enough to do so. Whether one thinks with a pen or a keyboard or just in the head, this is the answer to stuck-ness most of the time."

To avoid that "stuck-ness," research is an important component of writing, whether the work is fiction or non-fiction. Fred finds that, "the note-taking for research often takes the form of bits of fiction that utilize that research information. These fiction notes are often the bridge into the actual writing."

Getting a reaction before it goes to the publisher is an advantage. Reading from a work in progress is one way of gauging its effectiveness. Fred has worked both with publishing house editors and with people he knows and respects who are not associated with any publisher. "I haven't belonged to a writing group, although I respect them. Writing groups have been a very important part in the development of many writers I know. If I have a publisher and an assigned editor, I tend to save the reading for that person. If I were writing on spec, I might come to the point where I needed an outside reader. Writer friends have done this for me in the past, and I'm very grateful. My wife, Pamela Banting, is the best editor I know, tough and honest – qualities that are hard to find."

Writers often acknowledge mentors who have helped them along the

way. Fred says that, while he hasn't had a mentoring arrangement that involved just one or two people in a close writing relationship, he has received important help from a number of writers. "I have been fortunate to know a great many writers who have mentored me in brief but significant ways – sometimes nothing more formal than a conversation; occasionally giving an opinion on a draft. From other writers, I have picked up little pieces of craft here and there. I learned a lot from listening to people read, and of course from my own reading. I do think that when I read and study another author's work I am being mentored by that person."

Fred may not have one or two specific people who held the mentoring role for him but he certainly has held that role for others. "My work at the Banff Centre [on studio faculties] since 1996 comprises most of my mentoring in the last 15 years. Recently, I finished a three-day workshop on the short story in Meunster, SK and I'm about to begin a writer-in-residence in Fredericton, N.B." The role of the mentor is an important one in Fred's mind. "I believe the role of the mentor is to take a writer in the direction they want to go; to give them a perspective on their work and on the craft of writing that they may not have come to yet in their thoughts. Many times you are only telling writers what on some level they already know, or that they will find out eventually themselves. But mentoring can quicken the process."

Writing for many years, publishing many books and being a mentor should make the whole writing process easier, right? Not necessarily. "It is more difficult in the sense that I am more self-conscious; the days of furious writing, writing to exhaustion in a mad hurry, are mostly behind me. It is easier in the sense that I know better how to do what I set out to do. There are fewer times when I go a long distance down a road and simply run out of road. The fact of having written a few books gives me a confidence when I am most lost and uncertain. I can always tell myself, 'I've been here before and it has worked out. I will probably work it out again.'"

Looking at Fred's career from the outside, it is easy to say that he has been

successful as a writer. But what does being successful mean to him? "Writing is often described among my peers as a pursuit that is liberally mined with potential failure. We probably have to deal with more occasions of people saying no to us, not wanted here, than people in most trades or professions. There is no point at which that completely stops. But I do feel successful in quite a few ways. I have made a living as a writer since I was in my twenties. I feel good about that. The books have pile up, and I am proud of them. People seem to like what I write. I am proud of that as well. I don't expect respect from the people I meet for the work I've done; but when respect is there I enjoy that too. As a writer, the opportunity to write the next book is success."

Fred has had his share of awards and nominations for awards. However, it would be a mistake to assume that any part of his personal feeling of success as a writer rests on this. "I have had the pleasure and honour of winning a few awards. I have also missed out on a great many. At this point, I think my expectations are about where I want them to be. I never really expect to win an award; at the same time, I am pleased if I do." Having said that, "I would not want my sense of whether or not I am successful or not to ride on contest outcomes. That would be unwise and dangerous practice."

An equally dangerous practice would be to assume that, as a writer, one is the only moral compass for a society, although writers can be an important part of the process. "I am at an age where the people who run society politically and socially are often younger than I am. This has helped me to realize I must help in the ways that I can. This sense of responsibility began for me with writers' organizations belonging to them, serving on councils, presiding over them. These organizations primarily exist to look after writers, but at times they move beyond that to a less self-interested social advocacy role. My place in the politics of my province and country has been modest to date, but I do feel that my regular column in *Alberta Views* magazine is a platform of some use. I try to use it responsibly."

Part of what makes up Fred's social consciousness extends to the issue of censorship. "I don't believe in censorship of writing. As others have said before me, government initiatives in censorship are more apt to land on great writers with huge social consciences like the late Margaret Laurence than they are on the evil-intentioned porn merchants. Having seen a lot of simply good and honourable books get caught in the mesh of censorship I can never be in favour of it. At the same time, I think that exploitative media that translates directly into dangerous and even lethal activities among the young and other kinds of innocents should not be allowed to continue under some banner of artistic freedom."

Fred's concern with social issues is of primary importance in the next novel he is working. "It deals with air pollution in Alberta, as it affected farm families in the early days of sour gas processing in Alberta, and as it affects nearby communities now. It fictionally compares and contrasts the situation around 1960 to what is going on in the oil sands today. In five years I would hope to be well beyond that novel and working on another. I have films and non-fiction books in the works as well."

Written October 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Richard Stevenson

When literary things happen in Lethbridge, Alberta, there is a better-than-even chance that Rick Stevenson has a hand in their development. Since earning his MFA at the University of British Columbia and taking up a teaching position at Lethbridge Community College, he has been instrumental in getting Canada Council support to bring writers to town on reading tours, running workshops, establishing or helping to establish the local writers' groups Old Man River Writers and Most Vocal, and bringing the worlds of the general public and writers together.

The idea of becoming a writer came to Rick in bits and pieces. He began writing while in high school. Influenced by poets such as Bob Dylan and Country Joe and encouraged by his English teacher in Grade 10, he wrote protest lyrics about the Vietnam War. This gave him the confidence to write some poems to his girlfriend a couple of years later. In spite of this early interest it wasn't until his second year of university that he actually was hooked on the idea of writing. In fact, he started out his university career in Biology and Chemistry. It was a professor in the English department who encouraged Rick to change his major from Science to English during his second year.

Ideas come from everywhere. When he started out, he would wait to be inspired. But then Rick got some advice from the Canadian poet Irving Layton, who told him, "If you subscribe to the lightening bolt theory of inspiration, you'll be standing out in the rain a long time before you get hit. You might as well keep busy." Rick has always remembered that advice. While ideas at one time might have come from things he saw in the

Bibliography

Poetry

- Heirarchy At The Feeder*, dollarpoem editions, 1984 (chapbook)s
- Driving Offensively*, Sono Nis press, 1985
- Twelve House Plants*, dollarpoem editions, 1985 (chapbook)
- Suiting Up*, Third Eye Publications, 1986
- Horizontal Hotel: A Nigerian Odyssey*, TSAR Publications, 1989
- Whatever It Is Plants Dream...*, Goose Lane Editions, 1990
- Dick and Jane Have Sex*, greensleeve editions, 1990 (chapbook)
- Learning To Breathe*, Cacanadadada Press, 1992
- From the Mouths of Angels*, Ekstasis Editions, 1993
- Flying Coffins*, Ekstasis Editions, 1994
- Why Were All The Werewolves Men?*, Thistledown Press, 1994
- Wiser Pills*, HMS Electronic Books, 1994
- A Murder of Crows: New & Selected Poems*, Black Moss Press, 1998
- C4/ 4 Miles*, Sound Gallery Enterprises, 1999
- Live Evil: A Homage to Miles Davis*, Thistledown Press, 2000
- Hot Flashes: Maiduguri Haiku, Senryu, and Tanka*, Ekstasis Editions, 2001
- A Charm of Finches*, Ekstasis Editions, 2004
- Parrot With Tourette's*, Black Moss Press, 2004
- Fuzzy Dice*, Cubicle Press, 2004 (chapbook)
- Frank's Aquarium*, Cubicle Press, 2004 (chapbook)
- Riding On a Magpie Riff*, Black Moss Press, 2006

landscape around him, heard in conversation, or read in a newspaper or book, these days many of his ideas come from his research, "I read a lot of hard data first and then I get ideas from what I read."

Lately, he comments, "I've been dreaming up the entire concept, thinking of the entire book ahead of time." This changes how he thinks of the individual poem. "As you get a bigger skill set, you conceive of bigger things. You start operating at a more macro level. When you come down to individual pieces, you can actually conceive of what kind of thing you want in a particular place in the book."

As regards working procedures, "I don't think I have a routine, but I'm pretty much addicted to the writing process." While he may not have a specific routine, he has figured out how to gain maximum benefit from his time. In the winter, during the teaching year, he spends most of his efforts dealing with the *business* of writing. This is the time when query letters get written and marketing gets done. Along with the business things, he also writes book reviews during the winter months. It is during the summer that he concentrates on writing new poems and manuscripts. "I will tend to draft, first draft in one summer, second draft the next summer. Sometimes I will put the manuscript through more than one draft in a summer."

The process of revising a piece depends on a number of factors. The first is the poem itself. "Sometimes it is dozens of times, and, other times, I might just tinker with the piece and be done with it." Other factors are the length of the poem, and whether the poem is lyric or narrative. Lyric poems tend to be a lot longer in first than final draft, and I cut a lot of stuff to find the focus. "With narrative, after a while, you get better at channeling the lines to begin with, so there is less tinkering."

With a family, a teaching job, his volunteer work, and his writing, Rick says he feels he doesn't do the balancing act well. "I have a long-suffering wife and a supportive family. Even so, my priority list goes like this: fam-

Bye Bye Blackbird: An Elegiac Sequence for Miles Davis, Ekstasis Editions, 2007

Children's Poetry

Nothing Definite Yeti, Ekstasis Editions, 1999

Take Me To your Leader!, Bayeux Arts, 2003

Alex Anklebone & Andy the Dog, Bayeux Arts, 2005

Non-Fiction

Book reviews, essays

Forthcoming

A Tidings of Magpies: Haiku, Senryu, and Tanka, Spotted Cow Press, 2008

The Emerald Hour: Haiku, Senryu, and Zappai, Ekstasis Editions (photographs by Ellen McArthur), 2008

Wiser Pills, Frontenac House Ltd., 2008 (Revised) **[NEW]**

ily, job, avocation. I work in intensive bouts with rest periods. As long as I keep my priorities straight, I can shoot for Venus and occasionally hit the moon."

Rick is primarily known as a poet, but poetry is not the only genre in which he works. He has written a number of short stories, numerous poetry reviews, review articles, a few literary essays, and he a Young Adult novel. "Working in more than one genre definitely helps. It gives you more to work with in whatever genre you want."

Rick's earlier books are what he calls "text-based." His later works have moved towards collaboration between poetry, performance and music, specifically jazz. This fascination of combining poetry with music came about through a couple of factors. "I had a kind of epiphany living in Africa." He was in a bush bar, listening to a group of musicians play traditional music through a police bullhorn. The similarity to the work of jazz musician Miles Davis tweaked Rick's interest. "I suddenly saw a way of working a narrative through a line of monologues with a Beat and other aesthetic poetics using Black American jazz slang." The third factor was a chance meeting with a professional jazz trumpet player through the Old Man River Writers in Lethbridge. Both had a love of Miles Davis's work. "Gordon Leigh had had an earlier career as professional jazz trumpet player; I had the early poems; we got some musicians together and began experimenting. The whole experience has changed how I conceive of and write poetry."

As already noted, Rick is a founding member of the Old Man River Writers. He says, "Critiquing groups are great, so long as the people in them are ready for them, and so long as the level of criticism is good." Despite his enthusiasm for this and other groups, currently he does not participate in critiquing, but for the occasional student referral. Time and responsibilities just don't leave much time for going to meetings. His wife is his first editor. Rick says, "If I ask her if she likes something and she says, 'To a degree,' then I know it is back to the drawing board. I look for a non-literary

Awards

- Norma Epstein Award, Dean of Humanities, University of Toronto, 1983 (co-winner)
- Vancouver Literary Storefront Chapbook Award, 1983
- Stephan G. Stephansson Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1994
- ACIFA Excellence in Promoting Student Learning Award, 1996
- Pyrowords' Literary Rose Award, 1997

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- League of Canadian Poets
- Old Man River Writers
- Most Vocal
- Haiku Canada

response before I look for a literary one."

And that response is one way he determines whether or not a piece is finished. Rick has also been known to take poems to open reading events and try them out on an audience to help him determine whether or not they are finished. However, that is not the only way he decides where the piece ends. "Sometimes it is really obvious and sometimes it's not. I don't know that there is a final version of anything. You determine whether it works or not."

With all the books, reviews, and articles he has written, one could be forgiven for wondering what Rick's own definition of success might be. "Success is being acknowledged by your peers and betters more than by the ability to trundle off to the bank with a wheelbarrow full of cash." Moreover, awards don't seem to have much to do with this definition. He admits that awards probably meant more to him when he was a younger, less published writer. Now, "It's not about me so much anymore, but about trying to do a good job, conquering new turf and methodologies, and trying to master new genres."

Regardless of whether there are public accolades or not, Rick sees more than one role for the writer in the general community. He returns to a quote from Ezra Pound that poets are the antennae of the species as embodying how he sees the role: "You are a mouthpiece for what others may have seen." Expanding his thoughts, he says, "I don't think you are any better than anybody else, you are just a better wordsmith, that's all." Finally, he says that there are times when you write poems to find out what you think about something yourself. In the end, however, the writer should also both instruct and delight.

The idea that a writer should delight the audience perhaps has some influence over how he regards the issue of censorship. Rick thinks of censorship more in terms of respect for the audience. On the other hand, "I get very upset when somebody who doesn't know anything about po-

etry attempts to censor my work because he/she thinks it is inappropriate....” He says that at the present he is writing about a very sensitive subject and he is open to listening to anybody who might have concerns over the appropriateness of his subject matter. That doesn’t mean that he will stop writing about it. “I might still take the chance because I might be barking up the side of a tree that they wouldn’t touch.”

Rick has numerous people in his life who have given him support and guidance as his writing career grew. He is quick to mention Robert Sward, James McAuley, Madeleine DeFrees, Robin Skelton, Irving Layton, Richard Lemm, and Quincy Troupe as writers whom he considers mentors. And he has also played the role of mentor, as a teacher and a writer, most of his professional life. “I just think teaching is pay back for all the mentoring I received coming up.” He is thankful that nobody wanted to turn him into a clone and he certainly is not interested in having anybody he helps become a clone. “It is a joy to share my discoveries, knowledge and skills. That’s enough reward.”

He has a pretty clear idea of what he will be doing in the near future: “It looks like I’m going in the direction of short story and novel.” He also has the desire to write a lot more non-fiction and more children’s material. It would seem that there is little chance that Rick is going to slow down as a writer anytime soon.

Revised February 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Photo Credit: Trudie Lee Photographers

Website

www.arithavanherk.com

Aritha van Herk

Aritha van Herk was raised on a family farm southeast of Edmonton, Alberta during the 1960s. The world of the farm was a fairly isolated one back then. Despite growing up in a family with other children, Aritha often played by herself. The family didn't have a television, which meant that many of the hours she spent alone were devoted to reading. She learned to love books, and even though there might not have been a lot of books at home, there was a once-a-week trip to the library in Camrose, which she always looked forward to eagerly. She learned to read before she went to school.

While still a child, Aritha noticed there were virtually no Canadian children in the stories she read. More often than not, the stories referred to states instead of provinces. She wanted stories that were set in her own country. The first book she read that met that criterion was *Anne of Green Gables*. She wanted more. To satisfy that desire she scoured the library for books with Canadian themes or settings. This helped but didn't completely satisfy her need. Nevertheless, she says, "I can't say enough about the rural library."

Writing was something she had always wanted to do. Her next move was to start writing her own stories and poems. Encouragement came from all quarters, especially her parents, the librarians she came in contact with and her teachers. Her parents, her Grade 6 teacher and her high school English teacher stand out in her memory for their encouragement.

When Aritha was about 12, she began sending out poems to publishers.

Bibliography

Fiction

Judith, McClelland & Stewart, 1978

The Tent Peg, McClelland & Stewart, 1981

No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey, McClelland & Stewart, 1986

Places Far from Ellesmere: a georafictione, Red Deer College Press, 1990

Restlessness, Red Deer College Press, 1998

Non-Fiction

Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta, Penguin Books, 2001

Audacious and Adamant: the Story of Maverick Alberta, Key Porter Books, 2007

Ficto-Criticism

In Visible Ink: Crypto-fictions, NeWest Press, 1991

A Frozen Tongue: Collected ficto-criticism, Dangaroo Press, 1992

"Some of those early poems were published, although I would blush to read them now. But that got me started in terms of my own engagement with the writing life." While she was in high school her English teacher showed her books written by such Canadian writers as Al Purdy, Leonard Cohen and Margaret Laurence.

Aritha is a writer of fiction, non-fiction, criticism and popular history. She has nine books to her credit, and she has been published in and has edited numerous anthologies of Canadian writing. She spends little time worrying about whether working in more than one genre helps or hinders her writing process. "I don't delineate my writing in terms of genre; for me writing is writing, and good writing is good writing. If I'm writing an essay, I try to ensure that the essay is clear and cogent; if I am writing fiction, I strive for a narrative that is compelling and powerful. Because I do a fair amount of journalism, I try to translate intellectual ideas to the public in a way that is interesting and exciting."

What does influence writing, in her mind, is the practice itself. "I think it is essential to write, write, write and also to read, read, read in all genres, even those I don't write. The writer is necessarily someone engaged with words, always thinking about ideas in relation to language, and that matters most to me." It is this relationship between language and ideas that motivates her to revise her work, often a dozen times before she is satisfied.

Aritha is a professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Calgary and carries a full teaching load. Superimposed on this academic schedule is a regimen of travel, conferences and meetings to give readings and/or lectures that come as a result of her writing. And there are the demands of both the local and provincial writing communities. She has edited literary magazines, was President of the Writers Guild of Alberta 1988-1989, has been a member of the Literary Advisory Board of NeWest Press as well as a member of the Steering Committee for the Markin/Flanagan Distinguished Writers Program at the University of Calgary. She

Awards

- Seal First Novel Award, 1978
- Province of Alberta Achievement Award for Literature, 1978
- Superior Teacher Award for the Faculty of Humanities, University of Calgary, 1985
- “45 Below”: one of the 10 best young Canadian fiction writers below 45 years of age, 1986
- Georges Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1986
- Grant MacEwan Award, Alberta Community Development, 2002 (co-recipient)

Awards—Short-Listed

- Governor General’s Award, 1986
- YWCA Women of Distinction Award, YWCA, Calgary, 1988
- Georges Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1990
- YWCA Women of Distinction Award, YWCA, Calgary, 1992
- Georges Bugnet Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1998

Membership

- The Writers’ Union of Canada
- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Pen International
- ACTRA
- ACCUTE

makes a point of attending readings given by her students and other members of the writing community.

In spite of all of the demands on her time, she has no patience with individuals who complain they can’t find time to get their writing done. “If writing is important you will find time to write. You give up what isn’t important. It is a matter of putting it first. I work a killer schedule, getting up early and writing in the morning before the rest of the world gets up. My best work is done between six and 10.” If she gets five good pages written in a day, it has been a good writing day for her. Creating a balance of all the demands on her time seems elusive. Of having balance she says, “I don’t – I’m always off balance. I enjoy the surprises of a busy life.”

Part of the work that gets done in those early morning hours is the revision of material already written. “Sometimes I revise a piece of writing a dozen times.” She is fairly protective of her work and shows it to only a couple of trusted friends before sending it out to the publisher. Although Aritha hasn’t belonged to a critiquing group in some time, she says, “I have appreciated the energy those groups can arouse and support. I see such groups as being very helpful, if all members have the same goals and the same writerly focus.” In her view, each writer has a certain kind of relationship with the other members of the critiquing group, but it is not the same relationship that develops between an individual and a mentor. At the university she feels a responsibility toward her students to fill the role of mentor. “My job as a university professor means in part that I must mentor students or I would be a terrible teacher. But being a good mentor is a serious charge, and one that should not be taken lightly. You have to want the other person to achieve their potential, to reach a level that reflects their skills and abilities.” Aritha is keenly aware that she also had people who were mentors for her. They include Rudy Wiebe, Henry Kreisel, and Robert Kroetsch. “They were tremendously encouraging to me, and I thank them.”

As well as being a university professor, Aritha is known nationally and

internationally for her writing. However, fame is something she dismisses as meaningless. Recognition in the form of awards is something she struggles with constantly. "I try to ignore awards because in my experience, the deserving seldom get them. There is very seldom an honest evaluation of works in competition with one another. I do serve on juries, where I read every book and try to put aside any knowledge or connection to reach a fair judgement of quality". And in spite of the awards she has won and the recognition she has received, being sure of success is deceptive. "I don't see myself as successful, but I see myself as hardworking, and I feel rewarded by my satisfaction with the work that I have done. That means that I wrote the best possible piece or book that I could at the time, and I hope to continue to improve."

Thus it isn't fame or success or money that continue to drive Aritha to write – as she says, "No writer gets paid enough, especially considering what we have to do in order to get where we are." Rather, it's her love of language that motivates her. "Language is the most complicated tool in the world, more complicated than a computer, and yet it is a marvellously rich, textured tool." She sees using this tool as the role of the writer in the community: "We have the words, the voice, the evocative images and the linguistic skills that others might not possess. It is incumbent upon us to speak up; we must write and connect ideas to people. As more and more people become increasingly inexpressive and ineloquent, it is up to writers to push the standard of communication to a higher level."

As Aritha recognizes, language can be used to create hate and hurt as well as communication among the people of any given community. When this happens, the response of the community is often to censor that language. "Censorship is the mark of a fearful society. While I do not agree with hate work, any racist, homophobic or sexist writing, I also feel that censorship does not assist an intelligent public, who should exercise their citizenship by identifying and exposing hate-fuelled words."

Aritha has no plans to stop writing. "Only a writer can understand the

value of completing a sentence that conveys a powerful emotion or that says exactly what you want it to say. It's a hard life, challenging and difficult, but with subtle and satisfying rewards."

Written January 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Photo Credit: Jeremy Addington

Website

www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry/wayman

Tom Wayman

In the middle of our conversation Tom Wayman talks about revision and the need for it to happen, not just a couple of times but many times. In his work he may actually revise a piece between 50 and 100 times. "Some of those revisions aren't big, but revisions occur steadily. The San Francisco poet Lou Welsh used to say, 'The great winemaker is almost a magician to the bulk of his tribe, to his peers he is only accurate.' That's the challenge of craft. If the purpose of writing is just to get your thoughts down, then there's not much point in revising."

To clarify his point further he uses the example of the household grocery list. You don't bother to revise the list much, if at all, before heading for the grocery store. You already know that the word *cheese* means a certain kind, made by a certain dairy. But if the shopper is a house guest then he or she needs more clarification – is the cheese cheddar? Is it mild or strong? etc. That's the difference. "You know what you mean but for anybody else to get your meaning, the revision is necessary. When we're talking about revision we're talking about somebody who wants to be an artist."

Tom has been immersed in the world of writing and writers for as long as he can remember. For his father, a chemist, and his mother, a social worker, books and the writers who wrote them were highly esteemed. Because of his parents, Tom heard first-hand stories about many famous Canadian authors such as Earle Birney, Dorothy Livesay and Miriam Waddington, whom his parents had been friends with in the left-wing milieu in Toronto when they were young. His parents bought all the latest books

Bibliography

Poetry

Waiting For Wayman, McClelland & Stewart, 1973

For And Against The Moon, Macmillan, 1974

Money And Rain, Macmillan, 1975

Free Time, Macmillan, 1977

A Planet Mostly Sea, Turnstone, 1979

Living On The Ground, McClelland & Stewart, 1980

Introducing Tom Wayman: Selected Poems 1973-80,
Ontario Review Press, 1980

The Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, Thistledown, 1981

Counting The Hours, McClelland & Stewart, 1983

The Face of Jack Munro, Harbour, 1986

In a Small House on the Outskirts of Heaven, Harbour,
1989

Did I Miss Anything? Selected Poems 1973-1993,
Harbour, 1993

The Astonishing Weight of the Dead, Polestar, 1994

I'll Be Right Back: New & Selected Poems 1980-1996,
Ontario Review Press, 1997

The Colours of the Forest, Harbour, 1999

My Father's Cup, Harbour, 2002

High Speed Through Shoaling Water, Harbour, 2007

Fiction

Boundary Country, Eastern Washington University Press
& Thistledown, 2007

A Vain Thing, Turnstone, 2007

of poetry, too. So Tom met other Canadian poets like Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen through their work. The books would be in the house almost as soon as they were off the presses. "I grew up in a world where poetry was not marginalized, in a world where I thought everybody had these things in the house." And in a home where the idea of being a writer was supported. "I should say that for many of my friends who are writers that is highly unusual. Often their parents did not support them. The parents wanted them to get an honest job. If you can imagine what a relief it is to have a family that not only supports but honours the idea of being a writer. It is a very, very great privilege and a very rare experience among Canadian writers that I know." Almost as if to remove any possible doubt that Tom would identify with the world of writers, he says he has always known that through his mother, he is related to Leo Kennedy, one of the poets included in the anthology *New Provinces* (1936) along with A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott. This book is credited with marking the beginning of modernist poetry in Canada.

Adding to this background was Tom's somewhat atypical school experience. "I was accelerated through grade 5. That meant I was retarded socially – I was out of step. I was pushed to the sidelines. People who are pushed to the side often become writers. One of the things people on the sidelines can do is become musicians, writers, artists, because they tend to observe rather than be in the middle of things." This may not necessarily be a bad thing from the point of the writer. "The writer always has the last word. It's the writer's revenge on a society that has pushed him or her aside. To thereby define or explain that society to future generations, much to everyone's dismay."

Tom was born in the Ottawa valley and spent the first seven years of his life there, then moved with his family to Prince Rupert. At the age of 14 in 1959 he moved to Vancouver, where he finished high school. Like many people, Tom started writing poetry in high school. While there, he discovered a book, Lawrence Lipton's *The Holy Barbarians* (1959), about the Beat

Non-fiction

Inside Job: Essays on the New Work Writing, Harbour, 1983

A Country Not Considered: Canada, Culture, Work, Anansi, 1993

Anthologies edited

Beaton Abbot's Got the Contract: An Anthology of Working Poems, NeWest, 1974

A Government Job at Last: An Anthology of Working Poems, MacLeod & Stewart, 1976

Going For Coffee: Poetry on the Job, Harbour, 1981

East of Main: An Anthology of Poems from East Vancouver (co-edited with Calvin Wharton), Pulp, 1989

Paperwork: Contemporary Poems from the Job, Harbour, 1991

The Dominion of Love: An Anthology of Canadian Love Poems, Harbour, 2001

Movement in California." That book kind of blew my mind. It was my first exposure to poetry that wasn't rhymed or wasn't metered. I began to see you could express yourself in poetry so I began to write like that." Eventually, his parents moved back to Toronto but Tom stayed in Vancouver and attended the University of British Columbia for his undergraduate degree. "I always knew I wanted to write journalism," so he attended the university with that goal in mind. While there he worked on the student newspaper, *The Ubysey*. This was a training ground for going on to full-time employment at the *Vancouver Sun*. During his years at UBC he took creative writing courses "because I thought it would help my journalism." In his last year at the University of British Columbia he was editor-in-chief of the student paper, and prepared a poetry manuscript for his English honours thesis with Dorothy Livesay as his supervisor.

Working on the student newspaper generally guaranteed a job after university working for the *Sun*, but not for Tom. During his last year the newspaper got into a difference of opinion with the university administration regarding the university president. The publisher of the *Sun* was on the university Board of Governors and the downtown paper ran a blistering attack on the student paper. After graduation, Tom decided that "although I would probably have been hired by the *Sun*, I felt it was good to get out of Dodge for awhile."

On graduating in 1966, Tom won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, which usually assured the award holder of acceptance by any university grad program in North America. He thought seriously about attending the University of Iowa for their Creative Writing program. After getting conflicting messages from them about his writing, he decided on going to the new campus of the University of California in Orange County – Irvine — for their brand new Creative Writing program. "When I got to California two things happened: first, my values shifted because of the 60s. Second, I found creative writing way more fun than journalism. It had always bothered me that journalism only looks at a narrow spectrum of society:

Awards

- Fulbright Visiting Chair in Creative Writing, Arizona State U., winter term 2007
- Ralph Gustafson Chair in Poetry, Malaspina University-College, October 2007

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Association of Writers and Writing Programs
- Federation of B.C. Writers

courts, politics, fires, traffic accidents, and now a heavy dose of celebrity worship. That's not people's experiences through the day."

After graduation from UC Irvine in 1968 with his Master of Fine Arts degree, Tom got a teaching job at Colorado State University. However, this was the late 1960s and a tense time, especially in the United States. "That was as much my education as anything." After a tumultuous year in which 350 CSU students were arrested at various protests on campus, Tom lost his job and decided to return to Vancouver. Coming home in 1969 was not as easy as it might seem. He was unable to secure another teaching job. His first jobs after his return were in construction and demolition; he also worked as a high school marker and as an assemblyman in a Burnaby truck manufacturing plant. During this time he continued to write and publish poetry, especially about the world of daily employment. In 1975 the University of Windsor, on the strength of his writing about the everyday working world, invited him to be Writer-in-Residence for a year. This was his entry back into academia. Since that time he has held Writer-in-Residence positions at a number of institutions including the University of Alberta and the University of Toronto. He has also taught English and Creative Writing in such institutions as Wayne State University in Detroit, David Thompson University Centre in Nelson, B.C., Douglas College (New Westminster/Coquitlam), Kwantlen University College (Surrey/Richmond) and Okanagan University College (Kelowna/Vernon). He taught and was co-director of the writing program at the Kootenay School of the Arts in Nelson. Since 2002 he has been teaching at the University of Calgary. In 2007 he won a Fulbright scholarship and spent a term doing research at Arizona State University.

Having decided in California to write about what is central to everyday life, Tom's poetry earned him a title he isn't completely comfortable with: "the working man's poet." "It's a label but it's not accurate. If you really read my work closely, I think you'll find work as a topic is a minority of the subjects my poems tackle. Also, my concern has been work of every

kind—blue collar, but also white collar and even unpaid work — raising kids, or how we organize ‘free’ labour like a community clean-up of an area or building a dock at a church camp.” While his poetry may be what he is most noted for, his desire to write prose has not disappeared. “About 12 years ago I realized if I was ever going to try writing fiction I had just better get started and do it. I began writing and publishing short fiction in magazines.” In April 2007 a collection of short fiction was published jointly by Thistledown Press and the Eastern Washington University Press. Half the stories are set in south-eastern British Columbia and half range widely across space and time. In November 2007 a collection of four novellas was published by Turnstone Press. “Working in more than one genre you certainly learn about both. People always criticize my poetry for being too prosaic and now they criticize my prose for not being poetic. You can’t win.” Wayman likens the distinction between the genres as the difference between sculpture and painting. “A poem is very much like a painting in the sense that you see it all at once. You’ll come back and fine tune it but the bulk of it is gotten down in one sitting. Prose is more like sculpture. You’ve got to chip away at that old stone for quite a while and texture has a lot to do with it. You don’t see the whole thing. You have to walk around it. It’s not that one genre is better than the other, it’s just that they’re two different mediums.”

If one understands that, unlike journalism, writing poetry and fiction means one’s work is probably not going to have a wide readership, then the question becomes, why write at all? “A good question and one I constantly ask my students. The answer to that determines what you feed in and what you take out of your writing. Not just where is this poem or short story going, but where is your writing going? There’s not one answer to that. In my case, the overall impetus is, I believe, to construct an accurate depiction of everyday life because that’s what you don’t get from the media around you. It is the one place where poetry specifically, and writing in general, have the potential to present reality. Because of my personal inclination, I don’t believe the way we’ve organized daily life

represents the best the human race can do. At the heart of daily life for everyone is daily work. Everywhere on the planet it's organized in a hierarchical, undemocratic way. People so equate work with an undemocratic situation that they talk about 'a life/work balance,' as though we weren't alive at work. You spend the majority of your waking hours alive at work. Not only that, but unlike what the media tell you, work is mainly where you contribute to the community. Your contribution is not what you buy, the movies you see, the teams you root for. It is how you help provide the community with what it needs: education, child rearing, keeping the streets clear of snow, selling milk at the corner store. Nothing in our society reflects that fact. To me, there is an awful lot of material connected to that fact for a writer to articulate."

Just as the reasons for writing change over time, so do the ideas themselves and the way they affect the writer to become poems or short stories. "I think when you're an adolescent the ideas come out of feelings. They are so powerful that to calm them down you tend to write about them. Then you begin to read and often you want to match what you read. Inspiration comes from that. As an adult all I can say is that certain things strike me as worth turning into a poem or fiction." For one recent poem, the kinds of things that struck Tom as worth writing about were the deaths of two friends from cancer, a wasp infestation in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia where he lives when not away teaching, and forest fires that also were prevalent in the same area. Some of those events were "very jarring experiences." The connection between these events gave him the sense that they were worth writing about. It is that connection "that's the mysterious part of inspiration."

Inspiration is one thing, but getting the time to write can be quite another. Tom considers himself a "binge" writer. "I can write pretty consistently a few hours a day for the first half of each term but by the second half the job has taken over completely." Being a university professor helps, though. He has the summer months to work. Although he might have

all day to work during the summer, it doesn't mean that he can work for hours and hours on end. Usually, he will work from 9 o'clock in the morning until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. His writing time might extend to 3 o'clock if he is really on a roll. If he is working on poetry, he often will write longhand before putting the poem into the computer. If he is working on a piece of fiction, he usually types it into the computer directly. But when it comes to revision, that he does longhand. If there are additions, those also get added longhand and then the whole thing gets keyed in. "Then because I have a fair amount under cultivation on my place in the Kootenays, from 2 or 3 until 7 or 8 o'clock I'm outside doing those chores. I like the balance between intense computer time and then physical work."

Even when there is inspiration and the time to write, there is still no guarantee that the work will be published. "Working at an art school off and on over 10 years, I realized that it's not just literary artists who get rejected. That process of rejection is just part of the arts. If you want to function in the arts, you are stepping into a river of 'no' coming towards you. That's the reality." Tom has learned how to use the process of rejection as part of his compositional practice. "Submitting work for publication is one way of bouncing something off the world and having it come back to you rejected, and so in its least favour with you. Under these circumstances, most times I'll be able to recognize something in a rejected piece that needs improvement that I couldn't see before. That kind of rejection is useful." There is, however, the caveat of the taste of the editor who reads the work. "There's not much you can do about taste except to find those venues that are more responsive to your way of writing. That's just street smarts. There's nothing that will guarantee publication but there are some ways of guaranteeing rejection."

Learning to survive the river of "no" may keep one functioning in the world of the arts, but it doesn't necessarily make the act of writing any easier. In fact, even after all the years of experience, Tom says that writing is both harder and easier. "The world is less fresh when you've lived a long

time. Since the writing has to describe the world freshly, it's a lot of work because you're not seeing the world freshly. At the same time you have a far bigger reservoir of skill than you did when you started. The poet Robert Graves in one poem distinguishes between the "learned bard" and the "gifted child." I think for part of our career we're the gifted child. We've got energy – we just charge at this wonderful experience. After a while you become the learned bard. The world is not as fresh but you've got this huge reservoir of skill that the gifted child does not have. You can make things dance in a way he or she can't."

One way to survive that river of rejection is by participating in a critiquing group. Tom no longer belongs to a group but says, "Critiquing groups were very, very important to me for many years. At a certain point it wasn't important. I tell students that there is nothing you'll learn in a workshop or a critiquing group that you wouldn't learn over time just writing by yourself. But what a good creative writing class or a high-functioning writers' group can do is save you enormous amounts of time." Tom says one of the most important things that such a group can do for the writer is to show what that individual is doing right as well as what needs more work. Tom now uses the submission process to give him that same information. "I try to use submission as a means of bouncing my work off the world. I send out stuff to literary magazines constantly and I'm constantly rejected." One drawback when using the submission process as Tom does is that as one becomes older the editors who are receiving your work are less and less your peers. "That can be a problem. What a 24-year-old thinks should be paid attention to with regard to form or content, and what somebody two or three times his or her age thinks is important, can be very, very different."

Critiquing groups and editors may be two ways that Tom has gotten assistance with his work but they aren't the only sources of help. He has looked to certain writers as mentors. One of the writers who comes easily to mind for him is Al Purdy. "Not that Purdy had time for me personally,

but Purdy's writing was very important to me. I could see things going on there conversationally. His attention to everyday life. His insistence in the value of wherever you live. He gave me permission to try certain things – not just content but form." Another mentor is Pablo Neruda. Tom places some of the writers with whom he went to grad school on his list of mentors as well. "The personal mentors I've had are close friends who are close readers. They show me things going on that I would not otherwise see. The process of learning from other people around you continues your whole life."

In spite of having had mentors of his own and being a teacher for many years, Tom in fact is quite dismissive of being a mentor himself. "I think many people want to disparage and have contempt for their teachers because their goal is to surpass them, which is an excellent ambition. The best thing you can do as a teacher is to show students the widest possible variety than any art form encompasses. I think my anthologies of poems have showed some people the possibility of writing about daily work they had not seen. In that sense I think the anthologies were a kind of mentor. But it was not me personally."

Tom has been sending his work out into the world for many years. And the world has sent back recognition for it in the form of awards and nominations for awards. In 1976, for example, he won the A.J.M. Smith Prize from Michigan State University and U.S. Bicentennial Poetry Award from San Jose State University. His books of poems have been repeatedly nominated for the B.C. Book Prize for Poetry, and in 2003 his poetry collection *My Father's Cup* was nominated for the Governor-General's Literary Award for Poetry. Tom views the whole issue of awards with a jaundiced eye. "Awards and nominations now only mean to me that I've got pals on the jury. I say that because, for some reason, instead of award juries being readers, most often juries are comprised of other writers — who are the least qualified, in my opinion, to judge their colleagues and peers. I say this having been on juries myself, as well as having been nominated for

awards and having won awards." The major problem with having writers reading for juries, in Tom's mind, is that writers read with a different purpose in mind than readers do. His solution to this problem is to have juries that are a mixture of writers, bookstore people, ordinary readers and academics. It is important to note that "it's not that the writers on those juries aren't conscientious – they are. They do the best they can, but we writers invariably have our own axes to grind that differ significantly from those of a civilian reader."

With these concerns, awards don't figure largely in Tom's self-definition of success. "I don't see myself as successful at all with my writing." The reason for this goes back to his politics and part of the reason for his writing. He would like his writing to be part of a movement for beneficial social change. "I believe that writing could play a significant part in such a social movement for change, yet in the absence of that social movement, except here or there in very minuscule forms, I can't feel my writing is a success."

Perhaps as much as any other thing, facilitating this social change defines for Tom the role of the writer in the greater community. "There are many roles for writers and I wouldn't presume to decree them for others. For me, the overriding contribution I would like to make is to help facilitate clear writing that depicts what everyday life is like. To begin that conversation where people say, 'Our life is not like the movies; it is not like the media say it is.' Therefore, if you want a better life, it's not through winning the lottery, it's not through the Flames winning the Stanley Cup, it's not through winning Canadian Idol. It's not through all these goals that are put there for us that suggest our life is going to be better. These are phoney. For me, a worthy goal for a writer is to help facilitate that look at everyday life and how it might be changed collectively for the better. One lottery winner or a few vastly overpaid sports stars or CEOs do not make Canada or Alberta or Calgary a more enjoyable place for most people to live."

Looking honestly, accurately at everyday life can sometimes get a writer at cross-purposes with some members of his or her audience who demand censorship. "In theory, I'm against censorship, but some kinds of writing I find quite disturbing. I don't want to go to the corner store and find virulent anti-Christian or anti-Semitic tracts. But where's the line on that? I think I know where I draw the line but I would be reluctant to insist that other people draw the line there."

Tom will continue to reflect everyday life in his work. Having begun to write fiction, he wants to continue doing that. "Now that the short fiction has appeared, I have a 60s novel forthcoming in 2009 from The Dundurn Group in Toronto. There are two other novels set later in the 20th Century that I want to write, too." And he wants to keep teaching. At the University of Calgary the creative writing staff are working on new ways to teach writing, to "kick it up a notch. To offer a wider variety of courses and broaden the community to which we teach those courses. Those are potentially quite exciting developments."

Written March 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Lyle Weis

"Writers are the communicators for society," says Lyle Weis. "They convey ideas, they convey beauty, the concepts of the society in which they live." That is just one role that he sees for the writer in the community. "My conviction is that writing and education are bound together. I believe that writers can have a very profound impact on the educational system. Writers can act as mentors in the schools, they can act formally as instructors, they can give kids the kind of optimism that people need as they are growing up that they have something to say and should say it. That's why it is so important to have writers more directly involved in all levels and age groups in education. That's why I do what I do."

Lyle has spent the last 14 years travelling around the province of Alberta visiting schools, working with students from kindergarten to grade 12, sometimes for only a day but often for a week or more. "The earliest storytelling was the way to entertain, to share values, spiritual beliefs, and creativity. It is no different today." His workshops begin with some basic concepts mapped out on a storyboard for the youngest students; he then develops the sophistication of the concepts as he moves through the grade levels. "We shouldn't leave storytelling training up to television and movies and video games. We need to honour it [storytelling] and see how powerful it is."

Lyle was born in Ontario but spent the first 17 years of his life in the United States. When his family moved to Vancouver he got a BA in English and a teaching degree from Simon Fraser University. While teaching in an elementary school in the Vancouver area, he began work on his MA from

Website

www.telusplanet.net/public/lyleweis/MainPage.htm

Bibliography

Poetry

the mill under his skin, Thistledown Press, 1992

Young Adult Fiction

No Problem, We'll Fix It, General/Stoddard 1991

Burn It, Oz Media, 1994

Bush Party, Oz Media, 1994

Let's Wrestle, HodgePog Books, 2001

Non-fiction

Monthly Arts column, Culture Shock, 1994-97

Memberships

- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Writers Union of Canada
- Founding Editor, On Spec magazine
- Young Alberta Book Society

the University of British Columbia. Before completing his MA he moved to Vernon to teach English in the high school there and finish work on the degree. Not long after completing his Masters he moved to Edmonton to complete his Ph.D at the University of Alberta. In 1987 he became Executive Director of the Writers Guild of Alberta – a position he held until 1993. "I look back on it [the time with the Writers Guild] as one of the great life-changing events for me. It put me into direct contact with all kinds of writers and I began to find out how we formed a community that was important.... I'm very thankful for the time I spent with the Guild in that capacity."

As a boy, Lyle "spent a lot of time lost" in *The Three Musketeers*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, The Hardy Boy mysteries, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and *Dandelion Wine*. He got encouragement to read from his mother, who was always willing to drive him to the library. Reading is still important to him as an adult reader, with books like *Stormy Weather* by Carl Hiassen, *The Shining* by Stephen King, *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt and *Get Shorty* by Elmore Leonard standing out in particular.

Lyle's first short story, written as an 8 year old, was a present to his step-father. Encouragement to continue his writing came from his teachers all through school. By the time he was in his early 20s he was sending material out for publication. His move to Vernon coincided with his first publication in the local paper. On the heels of that came publication in the magazine *Grain*.

Since the days in Vernon, Lyle has published poetry in magazines across Canada and in the United States. He has published one book of poetry and has completed another poetry manuscript. He also has published four Young Adult books of fiction. He is working on an adult political mystery and another mystery for young adults. Writing in more than one genre at a time works well for Lyle. "It is a great way to get cross currents of inspiration. If I get stumped in one area I can go to another."

Lyle has no shortage of ideas for poems or novels. They come as a feeling similar to experiencing *deja vu*, as a new way of understanding something. "It is almost like seeing a scene unfolding in a movie — watching people will suddenly remind me of something else." And ideas don't often come by themselves. "One of my problems is that I tend to think metaphorically all the time. Objects can have huge meaning for me."

Lyle's writing routine starts about 8:30 in the morning and goes until 12:30. These days the routine suffers a bit as he is on the road a good deal of the year, visiting schools and giving workshops. To compensate, he tries always to set aside some time during the day to write, and is rigorously disciplined about getting back into the routine after travelling. He recommends keeping a journal while on the road: "When you come back from a road trip you have lots of raw material," and a journal is a good way of hanging on to it.

Of revision, which is part of that routine, "I revise endlessly." Having said that, he realizes that there has to be an end point. Determining that end point may "come when I read the work and begin to feel excited about it again." In his view, this applies particularly when writing prose. "Part of the process is reading passages aloud and listening to how they flow together and rediscovering the worth of it. When you are revising them again after a number of earlier revisions and you discover the things you initially knew were good and there they are again, that's the time when it is probably done."

Writing novels for both children and adults requires research, and there is the danger of convincing oneself that research is really writing. "Oh yeah, I learned as an academic that you can research yourself into a boundless future." To counteract that trap Lyle suggests starting the writing before the research is actually completed. "It is not a good thing to tell yourself I am going to do all this research first and then begin the writing. That can postpone the writing a couple of years."

Lyle joined the Edmonton critiquing group Copper Pig Society while he was working in the Guild office. The magazine *On Spec* resulted from this group. "People were really good. There was a lot of caring and informed criticism." For him the cliché "writing is a lonely business" is true, and the writing group helps to counteract that problem. Right now, however, it is impossible for him to fit a group into his schedule so he exchanges work with a couple of friends.

Although perhaps not mentors in the strictest definition of the word, Lyle has been influenced by the work of Ray Bradbury, Wallace Stevens, Elmore Leonard and Stephen King. Each writer offered him something: "King puts together a good yarn. Elmore Leonard is a master of dialogue." As well as having mentors, Lyle is a mentor for others, but he does find that being a mentor can cause problems when it comes to creating time to write. He spends blocks of time each year teaching children, ranging from kindergarten to grade 12, about writing. His classes concentrate on the basics of plot construction, use of language, storytelling and how the values of our culture are reflected or challenged in literature. He does find, however, that the travel sometimes conflicts with his writing.

Whether or not his years of experience have made writing easier or more difficult is not a simple question. Rejection isn't any easier to handle: "It can be a huge blow to your ego and sense of well being." His advice is to get the manuscript back into the mail as soon as possible. On the other hand, writing is easier now because he has learned how to give himself some of the advantages that he didn't know about when he was starting out. He understands better the kind of notes that really help. Easier or not, Lyle keeps writing and sending material out.

Which begs the question: with the books he has already published, how does he judge his own success? "You can't pin it down to a listing of books. I think the writing I'm doing now is far superior to the writing I was doing 15 or 20 years ago. I want to see the book of stories and poems that reflect that out there. That would be immensely gratifying." And awards

don't play much of a role in his self-definition of success. "Awards are nice but they are not as simple as they look. They are developed to recognize not only the worth of the work but also to reflect the social desires of a society or the community, the publishers groups or whatever – to reflect their values. It is impossible for any award to reflect all of those ambitions. It is a trap for a writer to get too much good feeling about an award."

For Lyle one of those societal values that may be reflected in choices for awards is the thorny issue of censorship. Adults supposedly are able to make and exercise choice and that is fine with him. His bigger concerns surround the issues of what children should or shouldn't be exposed to. Secondly, he is concerned about material that could be considered hate literature. His opinions are strong and he does not waver from them. In his mind, there are certain kinds of writing, movies and video games to which children simply should not be exposed. He is prepared to self-censor his own writing in order to avoid exposing his audiences to material he doesn't think is age-appropriate.

Difficulty getting the time hasn't dampened Lyle's enthusiasm for writing. It is more exciting now for him to work on a poem or a novel than it was back in his earlier years because he knows more about what he is doing. "I've learned things about characterization and plot development that I wouldn't have even dreamed about in my early 20s."

As he contemplates the next few years, Lyle returns to the importance of writers' being involved in education at all levels. The travel is time-consuming for sure: "This is one of the reasons I haven't written as much as I would have liked in the past couple of years." Nevertheless, he has no immediate plans to stop working within the system. He has always had a bit of a daydream to be involved in some way with establishing a smaller version of the Banff Centre for the Arts in the Okanogan in British Columbia, "maybe if I was 35 again." Not a daydream, however, are Lyle's hopes to have at least two more books published and be in the financial position of being able to write almost every day. "I just wish I was a much

faster writer and more ruthless with my time.”

Written May 2007

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.sheridwilson.com

Sheri-D Wilson

"I'm not an Underdog, I'm an Underwood."

Tap, tap, tap.

At 11 Sheri-D won the title of Singer Sewing Queen of Canada, for an outfit she designed and sewed. This achievement deeply affected the rest of her life: "After that I thought I would always wear the crown, and how was I to know that the tiara effect was a mere delusion." And she continues, "After I won I never sewed a stitch. So I guess thinking you're the best at something kills the drive of hunger that is needed to be an artist of any sort."

"I always loved tap dancing."

Sheri-D Wilson never finished high school. Although early test results indicated she had a higher-than-average IQ, she had a constant feeling of isolation, due in part to her reputation as "that weird chick who liked ballet." In her last year at Calgary's William Aberhart High School she was sent to see the Principal for throwing a watermelon off a school balcony. The Principal wasn't there when she arrived at his office, so she stapled his suit-jacket to the back of his chair. "I stapled it to his chair like he was there, so 'we' could conduct 'our' interrogation. I thought it was funnier than hell but he didn't." That joke cost her a year of high school credits, which was one of her reasons for not graduating. One thing she did accomplish, however, was to establish a school literary paper, called "The Family of Man," which still exists today. "I think that really informs who I

Bibliography

Poetry

Bulls Whip & Lambs Wool, Petarade Press, 1989

Swerve, Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993

Girl's Guide to Giving Head, Arsenal Pulp Press, 1996

The Sweet Taste of Lightning, Arsenal Pulp Press, 1998

Between Lovers, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002

Re:Zoom, Frontenac House Ltd., 2005

Autopsy of a Turvy World, Frontenac House Ltd., 2008

CDs

sweet taste of lightning, swerve sound, 2000

Re:Cord, swerve sound, 2007

Video/Poems

Passing, Independent; Susan Harman, 1992

I Am A Closet New Yorker, Much Music; Jill Battson, 1996

Airplane Paula, BravoFact; Julie Trimmingham, 2001

Inch By Inch, CBC; Michael Hamm, 2001

Spinsters Hanging in Trees, BravoFact; Michael Hamm, 2002

Surf Rave Girrly Girrl, BravoFact; Matt Embry, 2003

The Panty Portal Project, BravoFact; Sandi Somers, 2007

Drama

Confessions: A Jazz Player, Theatrum, 1991

Hung Drawn & Quartered, Swerve, Arsenal Pulp Press,

am as a person," she comments, referring to both the stapling incident and the literary paper. "I think who you are as a person informs how you write and what you write about."

"Let's tape beat of the tap in the kitchen sink."

Sheri-D began writing when she was 11, following a visit to her school by W.O. Mitchell, who read from *Who Has Seen the Wind*. "I thought that writers were invisible people or dead. It amazed me that a person could be a writer." Mitchell told the students that if they wanted to be writers they should keep a journal, starting right then. Years later when she was invited to the same festival press conference as Mitchell, she introduced herself and said "I took your advice and now I have a journal from when I was 11." To which he replied, "Joke's on you."

She wrote her first poem the same year she heard W.O. Mitchell. Intrigued by the gift of some Zulu beads, she developed a fascination with South Africa, which was reinforced by a BBC film she saw about apartheid. With encouragement from the school librarian, she wrote a poem on the subject: "The thought that people could treat other people like that freaked me out of my skin, so I wrote a poem about lions." Here began her realization of the importance of presentation as an essential aspect of poetry. "I was sitting at the kidney-shaped kitchen table and my Ma was making meat loaf. I wrote the poem out and I wanted to read it to her but she was distracted making meat loaf. So I remember saying, 'Remove your hands from the meat loaf, Ma, and listen to me.' I realized that if I ever read a poem again it would be in a situation where people were actually listening because it meant that much to me. And then my mum said, 'Read it, for God's sake, it's just poetry.' And that's when I also realized that poetry isn't holy, and if you want people to listen, stop being precious and get their attention."

"That tape recorder is a visible wiretap."

1993

Taboo X Two, Swerve, Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993

Between Lovers: Poetry as for Play, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002

Essays

Addicted: Notes From The Belly Of The Beast (2001, Greystone Books)

First Time Eyes: Unearthing Spoken Word (2007, Canadian Theatre Review)

Awards

- Best short video, AMPIA Awards, 2002
- USA Heavyweight Champion, 2003
- Woman of Vision Award, 2006
- Stephan G. Stephansson Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 2006

Short-Listed

- Nominated for five AMPIA Awards, 2001
- Nominated for two AMPIA Awards, 2003
- Re:Lit Award, 2006
- Nominated for a five Jessie Awards, 1991

After leaving high school, Sheri-D taught ballet to a clientele of more than 130 students, and started doing choreography for the University of Calgary's *Dance Montage*. Then, responding to a challenge from an X-boyfriend of German heritage that she would never be a "real German woman," she entered a Miss Oktoberfest contest, and won. At the time she made a speech in phonetic German. "I have no idea what I was saying so I just had to trust the translator."

On her return flight from the contest, an "old guy" sat next to her and asked her what she did. She replied "I'm a poet." The "old guy" was Robert Kroetsch on his way to Calgary to give a reading. When Sheri-D asked him what he did for a living, he replied "I'm a poet." To which she replied, "Aren't you a little old to make up a dream profession on an airplane?" A connection was made, and Kroetsch asked her to open for him at his poetry reading the following night. She readily agreed, despite having no idea what a poetry reading was. Prior to the reading she felt perfectly calm, but when the time came for her to read she suddenly realized she had no idea what she was supposed to do and she froze from nerves. Another fella in the audience came to her rescue, took her pages out of her hand, helped her to sit down, and read her poem. Although she had thought her poem was serious, the audience responded with waves of laughter. That was the night it dawned on her that she could write to make an audience laugh.

"In engineering they call it tap-changing."

After the reading, everything changed: "I kinda snapped," Sheri-D commented. She sold all her belongings and moved to Hawaii to surf, write poetry, take gliding lessons, heal and flip hamburgers at Hamburger Mary's. At that time she became obsessed with writing, "It didn't seem like something you did for other people – it is the process of writing and exploring and expressing that I like."

While in Hawaii she decided to study acting as a means towards more ef-

Memberships

- Calgary Spoken Word Society
- The Writers Guild of Alberta
- Alliance of Canadian Cinema Television and Radio Artists
- The League of Canadian Poets
- Socan
- Writers' Union of Canada – National Council
- Canadian Authors Association
- SWAN (Spoken Word Arts Network)

fectively presenting her poetry. She returned to Calgary and enrolled at Mount Royal College's Theatre Arts Program.

Directly after finishing the program she moved to Victoria to work with Kaleidoscope, who were working with Richard Fowler's directive towards theatre. After the contract ended she moved to Vancouver, with a vision of continuing her "life in a trunk." She was writing pieces that people enjoyed but they weren't sure how to categorize. "I fell between cracks I didn't even know existed. The work I was doing couldn't really be categorized. Spoken Word didn't exist yet, performance art was visual-art based, and theatre had a beginning, middle and end. Performance poetry was a goofy term people felt they were coining at the time. This was the beginning of her foray into what was to become Spoken Word. While in Vancouver she became interested in surrealism and Dadaism, realizing that this was what she had really been doing all along (sort of): "They really appealed to my random abstract mind." She was invited to join Melmoth, a Vancouver group associated with a similar group in Paris, France, and began getting her work published in Vancouver and Paris. She started to call herself a surrealist, with the realization she had to find out more about what a surrealist actually was, and began reading the work of all of surrealists she could get her hands on.

In 1983 she did her first performance piece called "Tightwire" at the Unit Pitt in Vancouver. By 1987 Sheri-D was writing performance pieces, working with a friend, Gordon Murray, who started Pop Tart magazine; together they created the Small Press Festival in Vancouver. In two years this Festival was the largest of its kind in western Canada. Murray also published her first book, *Bulls Whip & Lambs Wool*.

"Tap a new market for poetry ideas."

After the festival ended that year, Sheri-D was sitting in a cafe on west 4th, writing in her journal. Just as she wrote the words, "What will I do with the rest of my life?" she overheard someone at the next table say the word

"Naropa." It seemed to have something to do with an unorthodox university in Colorado. When she called information, and called The Naropa Institute she made the discovery that this was exactly what she must do. Realizing that another life decision was taking shape, she quickly sought out more information and learned that Naropa was the location of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Sheri-D did what seemed to her to be obvious: she applied. The application deadline was that very same day. She sent a postcard which included a short poem, her contact address, and the comment: "Applications are for squares." A few weeks later she received a postcard from Anne Waldman, a well-known poet who had assisted in starting Naropa, which read, "You're in, baby."

Sheri-D had just enough money to pay the entrance fee and fly to Denver. "I had to hitchhike to Boulder. I had no idea where I was going to stay when I got there." She found a place in a house with a group of Buddhist women, and studied with Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman, Diane di Prima, and William Burroughs. Soon she was writing as much and as fast as she could. Also while she was at Naropa she began studying with Marianne Faithfull and guitarist Barry Reynolds. It was the first time that she had ever worked with music backing her poetry. Eventually, Sheri-D moved to New York, to spend time with Barry Reynolds for the next eight years. While in New York she studied with the Beat poets, working with Reynolds and Ginsberg among others. "They helped me in ways that I will never be able to repay. They are the only people in my entire education who said that this isn't about money and this isn't about winning. All I had to do was stay true to poetry. What they did teach me is that how you live is how you write. How I live is exactly how I write."

Sheri-D is a living contradiction. One side of her personality meditates, contemplates and creates a peaceful environment of mindfulness and motion. "My home is a sanctum where I live a quiet life with my little parrot ChewChewKnee and my true love Mike. That is the place where I create and dream and work – inside stuff." And then there is the other side of

Sheri-D, the wild side. The wild side has included an open forum that has no boundaries or limitation. Sheri-D has always followed the intentions of openness created by the surrealists, "I've lived a highly charged sexualized life, and that was what I wrote about when I was younger. Turn on. Our poetry must reflect the world we live in."

"Meet you at the taproom after my Tantra class."

Her world has always included books. She began reading at three, and has read a wide range of material from Charles Dickens to James Joyce to Margaret Atwood. "When I'm reading and I'm tossing and turning and I can't find a comfortable position, it's because the book has got me so jumpy.... That kind of book makes the bottom of my feet have goose bumps. I love the feel of a good book and I like how a good book makes me feel, more alive somehow, more aware of many worlds."

To capture her world, Sheri-D's writing routine varies with the tasks before her. In general, she writes in the morning after checking her e-mail, while having her coffee. There are times, however, when writing becomes all consuming, when she ignores e-mail, telephone calls, even meals and sleep. "I immerse myself totally, sometimes for months at a stretch. I would like to do that more." She always has a notebook with her: "I do a lot of steering-wheel writing. I get an idea and I have to stop the car and write it down." If she wakes in the middle of the night, she has a notebook and pen beside her bed and writes it down while it is still alive in her mind. "I love to write in that suspended place between worlds, one foot in dream and the other in half dream."

This process of catching things as they fly by and writing them down isn't the end of the process. Revision plays an integral part in her writing. The actual number of times a piece is revised is determined by the piece. However, it is not uncommon for a poem to go through a hundred revisions over time. "A piece is never finished. Sometimes over the revision process, two poems will end up as one. All sorts of weird things can

happen. The poem tells you when it's finished for the moment." Whatever happens, it is seldom that she just writes a poem down and is done with it. And before she sends anything out, she has a couple of people she sends it to for their comments.

"Tapping yourself."

Undoubtedly the distinguishing characteristic of Sheri-D's poetry is that she writes more to be heard than to be read. "I'm not particular about writing for the person who studies literature. I don't follow any of their rules. I do follow all the rules of an orator. I'm very particular about space and time and sound and voice. I'm particular about the beat on the page — how it's going to read. Intention. I'm very particular about the rhythms on the page. I'm very particular about writing for another orator to be able to read it. If an actor picks up my work, they can read it as it is meant to be read." This is vital for understanding the depth of perspective in her work. "If you want to be seen on the page as a page poet, then you should just write for the page. You can take the same poem and rewrite it for the stage but they will be entirely different poems."

"Turn on the tap of your epiphany."

Over the years and through all of the experience of revision, her writing has changed. There was a time when she loved everything she did. Now, "When I hit something that has a ring to it I sometimes do a little dance around the house because I can hear it. That's when get thrilled. I used to get thrilled constantly, now I'm thrilled sporadically but my thrills are deeper. Hahaha."

In spite of being less easily satisfied with her writing, and working harder to make it as good as it can be, Sheri-D does still from time to time receive rejections. "I don't deal with rejection well. I'm sorry but I don't have much grace in this. I will continue hounding until you accept me. No way am I going to take rejection lying down." Sheri-D notes that working in the area of Spoken Word is often like hanging a sign asking for rejection on

the door. "I will send it out until it gets accepted."

Does acceptance equal success? For Sheri-D, the answer is yes and no. "There is nothing really to accomplish except the process of the poem. I'm in love with that. If I can write a poem that does to me what the poems of Al Purdy or Diane di Prima or Lorna Crozier or Patrick Lane or P.K. Page or Anne Waldman or Quincy Troupe or Lorca or Cohen or Ginsberg have done to me, then I will have done what I was put on this earth to do."

There is not much room for awards in her self-definition of success. "Awards are important to your career, they are not important to your poetry. It is delightful when you get them but that is not why I write. If you write your poems from the perspective of the alchemy of the poem and the transformation of yourself you have already won gold. I don't believe I have hit my own gold yet. Gold – as truth"

Sheri-D believes that writers have a huge responsibility to society, a viewpoint that goes all the way back to her time at Naropa and the influence of Anne Waldman and Diane Di Prima. "They made me aware of the responsibility that I had to the community. They took me under their wings and they beat me up too. They snipped my wings and told me, now you have to start again, now you have to learn to fly again with respect for your elders and respect for what has come before in history. I bow to them – the women before me – and I am humbled by their beauty and their living-of-poetry. The writer must be multi-faceted: seer, visionary, spokesperson, shit disturber. As a writer you have a responsibility to all those people you see around you. If you are reflecting society, you are going to write about things that are painful. Action, you must take action."

As fulfillment of part of that responsibility she founded the Calgary International Spoken Word Festival in 2003 and remains the director. The Festival is, at least in part, Sheri-D's response to being turned down to do a Masters degree in theatre at the University of Calgary. "I was so mad at them and my mind was twisted out of shape. I had a dream that night

that told me to start my own school." Each year, as part of the festival, there have been a number of workshops taught by some of the leading names in Spoken Word: Anne Waldman, Diane Di Prima, Quincy Troupe, Ivan E. Coyote. In 2007 she presented a proposal to the Banff Centre to include a Spoken Word program at the Centre. To help create the program she brought in 20 leading spoken word performers. The results were so successful that the Centre, in conjunction with Canada Council, created a program of study of Spoken Word. "It is very important to me that young people coming to Spoken Word have a place to come and study. In 2008, I will help facilitate the Spoken Word Program at the Banff Centre and the Festival will present workshops for people who want to further their understanding of the craft. I'm very happy about that."

"Tap the spirit, like a tree, maple syrup."

Given her view that the responsibility of the writer is to stir up the community, then Sheri-D can find no role for censorship. "I find it abhorrent. It gets more and more shocking as one gets older that nothing changes or it gets worse. People's minds are more and more closed instead of more and more open."

Finally, she has lots of things she still wants to do as a writer. "I have to write a novel. I want to write more plays. Of course, I want to continue playing in the field [of Spoken Word], stretching my own perceptions. I want to write something I'm really proud of. I want to love wider, and seek deeper and write poems about it. I want to drum all of the time, around fires and ritual and write poems about it. I want to travel and find out new things, and write about the adventures. I love to dream and dream some more and then write about it some more too. And I want all people to have voice, especially those who have been silenced. And most of all I want to see."

"Beat, beat, tap, tap, beat, beat, tap, tap, gong-chick-a-gong, bong, bong."

Written January 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Christopher Wiseman

Memory. "What I'm interested in is how accurate memory is and how we fictionalize our own lives," Chris Wiseman commented at the beginning of this interview. Chris Wiseman's earliest memory is of being caught up in the swirling mass of bodies during the evacuations of English port cities, in particular Hull, where he was born, when the Second World War was declared. His mother, gripping his hand, walked up to the engineer of one of the trains that stood waiting for passengers and asked the startled man where his train was going. She was told Scarborough and Chris and his mother and brother spent the war years in a somewhat decaying Edwardian town that had once been famous for its spa waters and "bathing machines."

"I owe my love of books and reading and literature to my mother." Despite the fact that she had not one but two children to look after and had to deal with the disruptions of air raids, rationing, and generally going without, his mother read a book to her boys every night. "She would march us down a two mile walk each way every Saturday morning to the Children's Library to get a book. It was a ritual." Among the many books that had a lasting effect on Chris is *Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame.

With the war over and his father out of the services, the family moved to Manchester, where Chris's father had a job at the university and Chris finished his secondary education at Manchester Grammar School.

While attending that all-boys school in Manchester he began to write poetry. "It was a bit difficult to write poetry without being sneered at."

Bibliography

Poetry

Depth of Meaning, 1959 (chapbook)

Avoidances & Celebrations, 1963 (chapbook)

Waiting for the Barbarians, Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1971

The Barbarian Files, University of Windsor/Sesame, 1975

The Upper Hand, Enitharmon/NeWest, 1981

An Ocean of Whispers, Sono Nis Press, 1982

Seven Love Poems, 1983 (chapbook)

Closings, 1986 (chapbook)

Postcards Home: Poems New & Selected, Sono Nis Press, 1988

Missing Persons, Sono Nis Press, 1989

Remembering Mr. Fox, Sono Nis Press, 1995

Crossing the Salt Flats, The Porcupine's Quill, 1999

In John Updike's Room: New & Selected Poems, The Porcupine's Quill, 2005

36 Cornelian Avenue, Vehicule Press, 2008 [NEW]

Non-Fiction

Beyond the Labyrinth: A Study of Edwin Muir's Poetry, Sono Nis, 1978

Nevertheless, it was at that school that one of his English teachers, Brian Giles, a highly decorated war veteran, published a book of his own poetry and suddenly Chris felt he had permission to write poetry too. It wasn't long before Chris and a number of other interested students were being invited to the Giles home to read and discuss poetry.

Once out of secondary school, Chris did the mandatory two year hitch in the Royal Air Force before heading off to Cambridge University to study English. Graduating from Cambridge after three years he was uncertain what he wanted to do. One of his professors suggested that because he was writing poetry and had begun to send a few pieces to magazines (with mixed results), perhaps he should consider going to the University of Iowa. He applied for and won a Writing Fellowship to the University of Iowa Creative Writing Program. Intending to stay only one year, he wound up staying three, due in large part to the influence of the American poet Donald Justice—"In Iowa I met my real mentor." Returning to England with his new wife, he taught first at the University of Manchester and then the new University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. It was here he finished his Ph.D.. His was the first Ph.D. to be granted from the English department at this university. By now he had two children. In 1969 Chris chose the new University of Calgary over the University of Texas to begin a teaching career, and moved his family to Canada. He has now lived in Calgary for 38 years.

"People don't believe me when I tell them that when I arrived in Calgary there was no literary scene to speak of. But it's true. Other than a few readings put on by the Canadian Authors Association: Calgary Branch, there was nothing. No established writers in Canada stopped here. Now we have an incredibly vibrant literary scene." And Chris can take pride in the fact that he had a hand in getting that scene established. Almost as soon as he began teaching at the University of Calgary he began agitating within the English department for a creative writing program. At the beginning were non-credit evening courses but by 1973 he was teaching

Awards

- College Literature Award at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, 1957, 1958
- Writing Fellowships, U. of Iowa 1959-1962
- Alberta Achievement Award for Excellence in the Literary Arts, 1988
- Teaching Excellence Award, U. of Calgary, 1988
- Stephan G. Stephannson Award, Writers Guild of Alberta Award for Postcards Home, 1988
- Alberta Culture Poetry Award for Postcards Home, 1988
- Alberta Culture Poetry Award for Missing Persons, 1989
- W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Award, for In John Updike's Room, 2005

Memberships

- League of Canadian Poets
- Writers Guild of Alberta
- Calgary Aero Space Museum
- Yorkshire Air Museum (England)
- Lincolnshire Lancaster Association
- The Ken Colyer Trust

the first credit courses as part of a Creative Writing Program. He taught in this program until he took early retirement in 1997.

The university community was not the only place Chris worked to build a living writing community. In the late 1970s Alberta writers were getting restless, wanting a voice in the way the province dealt with culture in general and writers in particular. Chris was part of the group of writers who spent many hours talking to members of the Legislature. In 1980 the Writers Guild of Alberta was formed and Chris was the Founding Vice-President and later President.

In spite of doing hundreds of readings in Alberta, the rest of Canada and England, the question "Where do you get your ideas from" is a perennial one. "It is the most difficult question that a writer ever has to answer. As a writer you are never completely sure about this." Chris says that his ideas come from radio and TV. "Sometimes they come from just thinking, or from something I've read." Chris sums up where ideas come by saying, "I don't know many poets who sit down and say 'Now what shall I write about today?' It doesn't work that way. I write about something that gets in my head, it comes back to me more and more, and I keep thinking about it. I need to say something about it, to deal with it."

Chris's writing routine has changed somewhat over the years. When his children were young and he was teaching, he would stay up late and write. He still does that. "It seems to be my natural clock." A change came, however, when the Leighton Studios opened at the Banff Centre in the mid-1980s, which led Chris to discover new possibilities. He has spent several weeks in Banff every year since the beginning. "I tend to write a lot of first drafts there. The first drafts of my last few books have almost all been written in Banff. I spend the rest of the year revising. I find revision a lot easier than getting the first draft." The most important thing about the whole process of writing is that when Chris runs into a roadblock in his writing, "I leave it because I now know that I am going to write again."

Revision may be easier than getting that first draft, but knowing when a poem is finished is not always easy. In order to get feedback about his work, Chris has belonged to critiquing groups in the past and may do so again. The main problem with groups, however, is "Too often members are too easy on each other." If the people in the group can trust each other and can be truly honest with each other, then Chris agrees that groups can provide support and perhaps even mentoring. Right now, however, he has three people to whom he often sends his work. In the end, Chris says, with practice it does get easier to recognize when the poem is finished.

As both a university professor and a writer, Chris knows the importance of having a mentor as well as the insecurity of being one. The most important mentor in his life was Donald Justice, an American poet whom Chris met while at the University of Iowa. "He kept me writing when I almost gave up". The first person to fill the role of mentor was his English teacher, Brian Giles. Adding to the list of mentors Chris says, "Don Coles in Toronto. I admire him hugely and have certainly been influenced by him."

It is one thing to have a mentor and quite another being one. The biggest problem with being a mentor is that, "You are never really sure you are right. You never lose those insecurities." For Chris, if there is to be a good mentoring relationship there must be a strong connection between himself and the other person. "The important things are finding the time to be there for them, encouraging them, and establishing honesty with them." When those things come together, he says, it can be very rewarding.

In spite of his 10 books and numerous academic articles published, writing is both easier and more difficult. "There is still that gulp when you face a blank piece of paper with only a few notes or something in your head." Part of the reason for its being more difficult is that "Your standards get higher and higher for yourself." On the other hand, Chris also knows that if he starts doodling on the page something will happen. Actually, writ-

ing in some ways has become more fun for him. "It is like learning to play an instrument. Once you can play it competently, it is fun to see what further effects you can create and how far you can go with them."

Chris is very pragmatic when it comes to the value of awards in his life: "Of course, there is huge personal pride." But he tempers his enthusiasm with the fact that he knows these awards are decided by juries, which are always influenced by personal taste. He has himself been on many juries, from the Canada Council to judging many literary competitions. He was on the Board of the Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts (now AFA) for three years. One of the writing awards that gives him an immense sense of satisfaction is the 2005 W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Prize—recognition from the city in which he has lived for so long. Even so, he acknowledges, "I know that if it had been another jury I wouldn't have won it, somebody else would have." He is also very proud to have been chosen by the late Peter Gzowski as the Calgary Poet Laureate for the 1991 Golf Tournament for Literacy.

Awards and publishing notwithstanding, accepting success is an elusive thing for Chris. "I don't think any writer in his or her heart really thinks that they are as good as they could be. Out of the 10 books published I think it is only in the last few that I'm getting close to the things I want to write. I can do some things well but my poetry, compared to the very best, well it is obvious to me that there is something I can't achieve which the geniuses – the Frosts and Larkins and Heaneys – have managed."

The role of the writer in the community at large, in Chris's eyes, is that of being a truth-teller: "Saying that there are certain things that matter a lot in life and I am going to try and say them." He says the things which need to be voiced are those surrounding the way people behave, the way they feel, and their caring for one another. I think the writer has to stand up for certain values that are absolutely crucial – the deep human feelings of love and grief, and, of course, respect, openness, frankness and truth-telling."

Part of being a truth-teller is dealing with censorship. Chris makes a major distinction between censorship for children and for adults. For adults, he says, "I don't believe in censorship at all. Freedom to read must mean freedom to read." This applies even when dealing with hate literature and holocaust deniers. "Turn the searchlight on it all. When it is hiding in the shadows it is more delicious."

Being a writer has not changed Chris's view of the world. "I think I feel more passionately about it because I've written." The passion and the writing will continue. He has a new book of poetry coming out in 2008 and more after that. He is also working on a Young Adult novel and is looking at writing more short stories and non-fiction.

Revised February 2008

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)



Website

www.marywoodbury.ca

Mary Woodbury

"One of the reasons you write is because it gives you life extensions instead of hair extensions. You're not living just your own but your characters' lives too!" So says Mary Woodbury. "I had to write because I couldn't draw and I couldn't memorize lines. As a human being I need approval and attention more than money, power or control. Writing, reading and doing presentations have given me enough of that to feel fulfilled as an artist and as a human being."

A career as a writer wasn't what Mary initially thought she would have. That's not to say that reading and writing weren't important to her: "Stories and words were my best friends." She remembers reading the *Nancy Drew* and *Hardy Boys* mysteries, and her parents reading her stories such as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Black Beauty* and the *Uncle Wiggly*. Being of a generation when the career options for women were limited to nursing, secretarial, and teaching, she chose teaching elementary school. She didn't think about the possibility of any other choice.

Mary grew up in London, Ontario, completing high school there. After high school she attended Teacher's College in London and received her Ontario teacher's certificate. She taught in both London and Kingston, Ontario. She married her high school sweetheart, Clair, after he finished his training at the Royal Military College in Kingston. Together they lived in Ontario, Italy, the United States and Newfoundland before moving to Edmonton. Because Mary's husband is a United Church minister, social issues have played an important role in their lives together. They both worked with underprivileged people in each of the places they've lived.

Bibliography

Children's Fiction

Where in the World is Jenny Parker, Groundwood, Toronto, 1989

Letting Go, Scholastic Press, 1992

The Invisible Polly McDoodle, Coteau Books, 1994

A Gift for Johnny-Know-It-All, River Books, 1996

Croques, Tout Rond, (Polly McDoodle), Heritage jeunesse, 1997

Jess and the Runaway Grandpa, Coteau Books, 1997

Brad's Universe, Orca Books, 1998

The Intrepid Polly McDoodle, Coteau Books, 1998

The Innocent Polly McDoodle, Coteau Books, 2000

The Incredible Polly McDoodle, Coteau Books, 2002

A Ghost in the Machine, Coteau Books, 2003

The International McDoodle, Coteau Books, 2004

Flight of the Tiger Moth, Coteau Books, 2007

Adult Readers' Theatre

The Midwife's Tale, Woodlake Books, 1990

Poetry

Fruitbodies, River Books, 1996 (adult)

By the time she and her husband moved to St. John's, Newfoundland, they had a family. Her husband was still taking university courses. There was a need for more family income. Mary went back to taking night courses in journalism and creative writing, something she had begun when they lived in Montreal. This time it was at Memorial University. She studied with Harold Horwood and met Farley Mowat. She immersed herself in the writing community there, helping to found the Writers Guild in Newfoundland.

Mary made inroads into the world of being a writer by getting poems published, by getting work accepted for Robert Weaver's CBC program "Anthology" and by writing articles for the United Church paper. She now had a growing family and realized that the demands of being a mother and a minister's wife needed her attention. She set her writing aside and for 10 years concentrated on her family and a number of social activist causes.

Mary and her husband settled in Edmonton, in 1979. Not long after arriving she began work for the Government of Alberta as a Public Affairs Officer. That didn't satisfy her urge to write. She decided to return to her creative writing career. She heard about the newly formed Writers Guild and went to the first meeting in Edmonton. Mary realized that what she wanted was a community of writers and there it was! She joined the Executive of the Guild soon after becoming a member. "It was the support of Alberta Culture and the Writers Guild that got me to the point where I am now."

When she returned to her writing, she completed two adult novels but tucked them both away in a desk drawer. Deciding that writing "shorter books for shorter people" might be the way to go, she began working on novels for children. Her first children's novel was brought out by Groundwood in 1989. She now has 13 children's novels published. Looking back on her beginning, "I realized that I was already in my 50s and I had better knuckle down if I wanted to make a statement about having a career."

Knuckling down meant "Applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the

Awards

- Best Bet, Ontario Library Association, 2007

Short-listed

- Alberta Writing for Youth Competition, 1997
- The Silver Birch Award, 1997
- The Torgi Award, 1997
- The Manitoba Reader's Choice Award, 1997
- Red Maple Award, 1999
- R. Ross Arnett Award, Writers Guild of Alberta, 1999

Memberships

- Canadian Society for Children's Authors, Illustrators and Performers (CANSCAIP)
- Writers Guild of Alberta

chair. If you have the passion, you'll find the time to write." Time was not necessarily an easy thing for her to find. Her family had grown to include four children. At first she wrote when they were napping. Later, she says, "I time by having a very sweet husband who understood..." Now, with her family grown, her writing routine begins about 9 a. m. and runs until about 2 p.m. with a break for lunch. Afternoons get used for the myriad of tasks that surround writing: answering e-mails, responding to invitations to give readings or workshops, sending out material to publishers.

Revision is an ongoing process. Each day Mary reviews what she has done until the manuscript reaches about 30 pages. From then on the daily revision goes back over the last 10 pages written. By the time she has finished a first draft she has probably revised it several times. Once she feels she has a good draft she goes over it again, beefing up the places she feels need it. Then, and only then, does she show it to anybody.

In the early days of her writing Mary belonged to a critiquing group. The group was a great idea and in her opinion is a good thing for the beginning writer. At this stage in her career, she says she gets to the point where she can't look at the work any more. She puts it away and gets it out a couple of weeks later. If there are changes to make she makes them. Then she shows her work to one or two really good friends who are also writers. She relies on them to tell her: "Yeah, you've finished a good draft. Here are our ideas." Her husband finishes the manuscript off by doing a final typing/edit on the computer before it goes to the publisher. "I want the manuscript to look like it is ready to be printed. A lot of people in classes I've taught say it doesn't matter because they [the publisher] will do something with it anyway. It does matter because you have to show them you are a professional."

Writing is both easier and harder than when she started. The easy part comes because "I understand my process better." And she has found some friendly publishers and that always makes for a secure feeling. It has also become harder over the years. Part of the reason for that is there

are "So many really great writers in Canada for young people now." But even if she finds that a little intimidating from time to time, she also gets e-mail from her colleagues that tell her when she has made it onto lists for teachers such as Resource Links. She was recently listed on the "Best Of" the Resource Links list for 2007. Because, as she says, "there are so many more good writers out there," the competition has become much stiffer. There were half or perhaps less than half the number of books being published when she started writing her stories. "I think we've learned as a country to train our writers really well."

Part of her training comes with having written poetry, non-fiction, Young Adult fiction, and monologues. Writing in all of these genres "I think helps because it comes from a different chunk of my head. I move from the children's story chunk to the older woman poet or the older woman monologues and it's like a change is as good as a rest."

Even with 14 books, rejection can still happen. Mary says she doesn't handle rejection well. Sometimes she will console herself by drinking chocolate milkshakes for a couple of days and feeling it was a fluke that she ever got published. "You're two people," she says, "the writer, and the artist who is off being a kid somewhere. You should never let the kid see the negative reviews."

Not all reviews are negative and some of the positive ones come in the form of awards. For writers, these really make a difference in selling books. "When eight hundred books are produced in a year for children, how do you get noticed? They [the awards] help parents and teachers choose what they will put in their libraries. Unfortunately, it is a business as well as an art." While awards may be important, they are not the way that she measures success. Success is turning out a consistently good product. She takes pride in standing behind her work, ensuring that it is a good read.

Not only is the role of the writer to produce a consistently good product, it is important, in Mary's opinion, that everywhere you go you are aware that you

are a part of a larger community, reminding those who think that we can get along without art that, "Without the arts we are not human. We're the singers, the dancers, the visual artists who celebrate our life on the planet and give every man and woman the tools to capture their journey, their history, their spirit. The community, whether it knows it or not, needs artists to help the common people feel at home with themselves and the universe."

Sometimes the role of the writer can be a difficult one, especially, if the community doesn't feel comfortable with everything the writer is doing and saying. "I think you have to trust your best work to the public — period. Censorship erodes everything. It can come from the right or the left or from those fearful of external censorship and loss of revenue." One of the biggest concerns about censorship is the apparent need to have history rewritten. As an example, Mary tells of having to change the details in her latest novel from having a Stephen Foster songbook on the piano to a Cole Porter songbook. "I grew up in the 1940s and I remember what it was like. I wanted to be authentic." This whole issue of rewriting history is a major one for Mary. "It's one of my greatest fears that we are going to rewrite history to make it politically correct and we can't do that. I don't agree with whitewashing history because some school isn't going to buy my book."

The future is not hard for Mary to predict. She isn't writing quite as fast as she did before. She doesn't have as much to prove to herself now so she can be a little more choosy about the projects she works on. "In five years, I'll probably be sitting here writing a book or revising one. It is never too late to write a good book, to follow your dream. It does work. When I think back 20 years ago when I found out they were publishing my first book, I had no idea the journey I was going to be on. I am really pleased I've done it. I wouldn't change anything." But books aren't the only projects that require her attention. She has her grandchildren too.

Revised September 2009

[RETURN TO START OF PROFILE](#)