

# WRITE

THE MAGAZINE OF  
**THE WRITERS'  
UNION OF  
CANADA**

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SPRING 2021

**Scrivener:  
Your New  
Best Friend?**

**8**

**Yes! You Should  
Start a Podcast**

**10**

**Healing  
Through Poetry**

**14**





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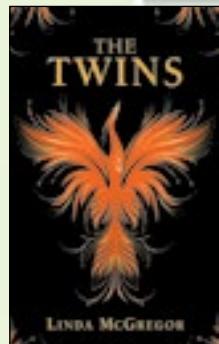
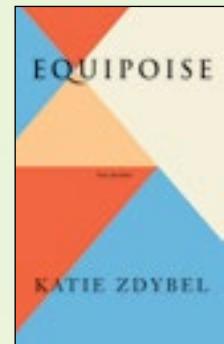
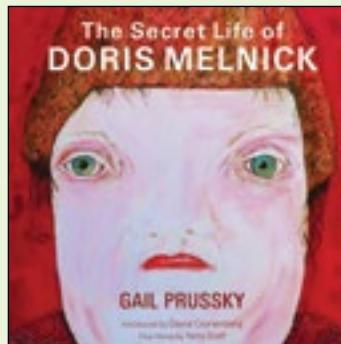
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# From the Chair

By Anita Daher

*In late February I watched a Facebook Live author interview from Reykjavik, Iceland. During the Q&A part of the broadcast, someone asked the host how he'd fared during the 5.6 magnitude earthquake that had rumbled through earlier that day. He said that homes in his city were built to withstand such events. He said they had strong foundations.*

The same can be said of the foundation the Icelandic government provides its writing and publishing industry from pre-production to post. Through a process similar to a grant application (but not project specific), it offers eligible writers an annual artist salary. Publishers are reimbursed a portion of production and marketing expenses, as well as fees and royalties paid to authors and translators. For the public, there is the annual "Christmas Book Flood," in which a government-produced brochure is sent to households listing every newly released Icelandic book.

Norway's programs are equally appealing. Its government provides work grants to authors for up to ten years — again, not project specific. It also has a program to purchase new releases from publishers and send them to libraries. Norway was the country of honour at the 2019 Frankfurt Book Fair where it shared details of its purchasing program.

The message communicated to writers and the reading public through these programs has value beyond the monetary. It says, "We celebrate your creative voices. Your stories are our stories, meaningful to our country, and our identity."

In Canada, our government provides production and marketing support to publishers through the Canada Book Fund. However, post-production support is minimal, especially for creators. Publishers have increasingly come to rely on authors to carry the weight of publicity and outreach. It is no longer enough to write our books. We must also be marketers, publicists, booking agents, videographers, performers, and more. Despite taking on larger workloads, our incomes have diminished.

TWUC has pressed again and again, through meetings, presentations, reports, media releases, public forums, and briefings, for government support in specific areas. Our current focus:

1. Amend the *Copyright Act* to rectify unregulated educational copying.
2. Increase the Public Lending Right budget to adjust for inflation.
3. Implement a Guaranteed Basic Income.



These elements would boost and repair our income earning potential, but there are additional initiatives our government could institute. It could create an environment where Canadian titles enjoy greater public awareness, and (at minimum) equal footing with those from beyond our border published by conglomerates with marketing budgets that dwarf those of our independent publishers. It could also offer booksellers and publishers the same book shipping rate it extends to libraries so that they might compete with companies such as Amazon (is there another animal like Amazon?).

Your Union has fought and lobbied and been consistent in our pressure for change and improved conditions for our writers. We have not yet achieved all we need to ensure a sustainable future within our industry, but lawmakers have heard us. We must press on.

If you have considered becoming more actively involved in our Union, do it — you will be glad you did. I am. My term, and those of several of my fellow members of National Council will end in just a few weeks.

From our Executive Council, Rhea Tregebov will complete her two-year term as First Vice-Chair and become Chair as my two-year term comes to a close. This gracious, tough, and articulate woman will serve you well. Heather J. Wood has been Second Vice-Chair since 2017 and completes her second and final term this year. Richard King begins the second year of his term as Treasurer.

Regional representatives completing their terms this year are Caitlin Hicks (BC/Yukon) and Bruce Rice (Manitoba/Saskatchewan).

Tommy Schnurmacher, who stepped in as Quebec representative last fall, has put his name forward to continue as our Quebec representative for the next two-year term.

Regional representatives Janice MacDonald (Alberta/NWT/Nunavut), Kim Fahner (Ontario), and Stephen Kimber (Atlantic) will each begin the second of their two-year terms.

Kevin Chong, Cobra Collins, and Alejandro Saravia each complete their one-year terms as advocates. Per our constitution, advocates are elected (and re-elected) at our AGM, which will be virtual again this year. We will also vote in committees and chairs.

Serving our country's authors through National Council, task forces, committees, and other volunteer opportunities is fulfilling and important work. Together we fight for a strong foundation and better economic future for all Canadian writers.

Onward!

# Contents SPRING 2021

**3** Chair's Report

**5** Writing Rights

## WRITER'S BLOT

**7** Writer's Prompt

## FEATURES

**8** When Software Changes Your Life... or at Least Your Writing

BY CRAIG TERLSON

**10** We're All Ears: Is Podcasting for You?

BY PHILIP MOSCOVITCH

**12** Why Write?

BY WAYNE GRADY

## DISPATCHES

**14** At the Entrance of a Dark Alley

BY CAROLE GLASSER LANGILLE

**15** Lost and Found in Translation

BY KEVIN CONNERY

**16** By the Numbers

BY MICHELLE BARKER

**17** Too Much of a Good Thing

BY JOSHUA KEEP

**18** Embodied: A Tale of Resilience

BY REBECCA DIEM

**20** NEWS

## MEMBER NEWS & AWARDS

**22** Announcements

**23** Awards

**24** New Members

**25** IN MEMORIAM

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# Writing Rights

## Life+70. An Extra Twenty Years of ... What, Exactly?

By John Degen



*As I write this, I am also putting together TWUC's submission to a federal consultation on the extension of the copyright term of protection in Canada and fighting the urge to just throw up my hands in cynical surrender.*

After the previous decade of artists' rights advocacy, it's hard to hear the words "copyright" and "consultation" together without wanting to run headlong into a brick wall. Doing so might be about as effective as any other strategy for improving the lot of Canada's artists at this point, and it would certainly feel similar.

The two federal ministries responsible for Canada's copyright regime, Canadian Heritage and Innovation, Science & Industry, have asked to hear from Canadians about their plans to add twenty years to the term of protection afforded creative work in this country. To be clear, this development is a win for professional creators. At the moment, our work legally belongs to us for our lifetimes plus the fifty years immediately following our deaths. The coming term extension will mean we get seventy years of continued ownership after death.

What that means, practically speaking, is twenty more years of control over the real and potential value of the creative work we are doing today.

"But, John," you say, "why should I care whether my copyright lasts another fifty years or seventy years. I'll be dead."

True, but if you can look beyond the essential morbidity of measuring value in this way, I encourage you to see this change as validation of your work and the life choices you've made to create it. It is called *Life+70*, after all, not *Grim Death Starts the Clock*. The rights to your work are a form of property. As you write, you are building your own library. And for many authors, that library will make up an essential part of the estate you leave to your chosen heirs. With life expectancies increasing (*theoretically*, he says, from inside a global pandemic) it is reasonable to imagine one's primary heirs — the kids and grandkids of our generation — will be around to enjoy the fruits of their inheritance from you for most if not all of their own lifetimes.

With this change to Canada's copyright term, your country is saying we think your work should be as valued as that of an American author, a British author, an Australian author, or an author from any of the European Union states (these countries all have Life+70 copyright terms and are at the leading edge of

what looks to become a worldwide minimum standard). What this means is that Canada's new Life+70 term will keep us competitive in our most established international markets. After all, international publishers now know they will have the opportunity to make a deal sharing in an extra twenty years of your brilliance.

I'd love to be able to say this change has come about because of the persistent and persuasive advocacy of TWUC and other arts advocacy groups. We are, after all, officially in favour of term extension, and have answered so whenever asked about it in the many other copyright consultations in which we've participated. But, no, Canada's authors have someone else to thank for this legal windfall — our neighbours immediately to the south. During negotiations, the Americans insisted on protecting their own Life+70 term as a minimum standard within the Canada United States Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). In a way, that means Canada's negotiators viewed adopting Life+70 as a concession during trade talks. Had Canada been truly enthusiastic about extension, we might have pushed everyone in the deal to adopt Mexico's Life+100 term.

However it came about, TWUC is happy to see an extra twenty years of term adopted in Canada, and our official submission to the federal ministries will say so. But we'll also be taking the opportunity of the consultation to remind those same ministries that a copyright term of any length is only as good as the copyright law it supports. After all, the past decade in Canada has seen a revenue shift away from copyright holders amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. The failure of successive federal governments to protect the value of our labour in the educational market significantly dilutes the meaning of Life+ ... well, *anything*.

If I can't set a price for the copying of my work, and have a reasonable legal expectation that anyone who does copy will be obligated to pay, what difference does it make to me, my kids, and grandkids if we get to enjoy copyright "ownership" for an extra twenty years?

Thank you for the term extension, Canada. Now, make it mean something.

# **It's Elementary!**

## **Canadian creators should be paid fairly for their work, even if it's for education.**

Fair payment for creators  
requires fair copyright law.

The government needs  
to do its part.

Learn more by visiting  
[ivaluecanadianstories.ca](http://ivaluecanadianstories.ca)



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STORIES**

# Writer's Blot

WRITER'S PROMPT /

## Writing Out of My Own Horn

BY HONEY NOVICK



*"Music is your own experience, your thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn." — Charlie Parker*

Singing was my first love. When I wanted to sing words that meant something to me, I sought those words of meaning in poetry and in lyrics (folk songs, art songs). If and when I couldn't find them, I challenged myself to write my own singable words, for example, "I Am a Winner":

I am a winner, you are one too  
It takes one to know one,  
How do you do?  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,  
I know something really GREAT!!!  
I am a winner, you are one, too.... etc.

I came to writing later in life. It was very personal, drawing me as a magnet or as temptation would beckon to a lover, or yearning for my mother or father's comforting shoulder or even just having a very best friend. Poetry was and is the most accessible. Through poetry, I can distill my feelings and observations into poetic expressions. I can conquer the devil of loneliness and squelch the fire of the raging dragon. Most importantly, writing helps me make new friends — but not always, as some people don't always agree with my point of view. Yet I always challenge myself to hope my writing will connect with you, the dear reader. Would you be interested in seeing me, knowing me as a friend, neighbour, citizen? Are there various ways I can capture your attention and engage your interest?

As a teenager in the exciting 1960s, I was inspired by reading and then empathizing with Anne Frank to keep a diary. I did so

consistently for nine years (eventually having excerpts of this teenage angst published in General Idea's *FILE Magazine*). Mainly I wrote about how I wanted to sing. In retrospect, I was writing about wanting to be heard. Slowly that started to happen. In time, I became the singer who could interpret poetry and sang tributes to Irving Layton (in his honour with him present, at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal, Leonard Cohen seated next to him), Leonard Cohen (five times, twice at Toronto's Reference Library), bill bissett, Austin Clarke, George Elliott Clarke, Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, and many others. Through the voices of others, I found my own sound, colour, authenticity, confidence (a journey that is constantly evolving).

It takes courage, a sense of imaginative adventure, and a desire to want to be heard through the pen, the horn, or the voice. It must be done. How else can humanity survive? If we, as a society, a culture, or individuals, don't reach out to one another at the risk of seeming foolish, how else can we evolve? Let's all fly by the seat of our pants or the slits in our skirts and soar in this unlimited realm of using the word as the lamp that lights the way. After all, in a darkened cave, when one lights a match, everything is illuminated.

*"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when people are afraid of the light!" — Plato*

*Honey Novick is a singer/songwriter, voice teacher, and poet living in Toronto. She has been published in numerous anthologies and has released nine chapbooks and eight CDs. She is the 2020 recipient of the Mentor Award from CSARN, the Canadian Senior Artists Resource Network, third-time awardee of the Dr. Reva Gerstein Legacy Fund, and recipient of the 2020 Community Hero Award. She teaches Voice Yoga and sings with bill bissett and George Elliott Clarke. Her next collection of poetry is called Bob Dylan, My Rabbi. [www.honeynovick.com](http://www.honeynovick.com)*



# When Software Changes Your Life... or at Least Your Writing

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BY CRAIG TERLSON

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The writing program Scrivener was released in 2007, and for a lot of writers this brilliant piece of software was a game-changer.

**W**hen asked what has had the biggest impact on our work, writers rarely answer, “a piece of software.” But perhaps that was in the time I now refer to as B.S.E. (Before the Scrivener Era). Most likely you’ve heard writers on social media talk about Scrivener and wondered how an inexpensive piece of software (\$67 for the full version) could make such a difference. I’m one of those writers.

When I started writing my first long narrative, which a decade later became my first novel, like most of us I used MS Word. If you’ve worked on a long narrative, or a book-length nonfiction piece, you know the buckets of information that has to be gathered, including research, outlines, character sketches, chapters saved, and chapters dumped. As well, you probably have multiple drafts and versions with names like: Greatnovel.2a.final.seriously.reallythisone.docx.

As I built that first novel, the hierachal list of folders and files compared in complexity to the building of the great pyramids. But as opposed to their beauty and wonder, my pile was a mess — picture a giant recycling blue box where nothing is properly sorted.

Along came Scrivener (A.S.E.), and everything changed. If you’ve dipped a writerly toe into this program, you might opine, okay,

instead of a bunch of files and folders, I get everything on one screen. What’s the big deal? It turns out that for both fiction and nonfiction writers, it’s a very big deal. For starters, Scrivener’s creator, Keith Blount, designed the program because he was so frustrated with the constant shuffling and reordering of files with the construction of his own novel. In other words, he knew how writers think.

Rather than going into long tutorials and testimonials (there are plenty available on the web), I’m going to hit a few of the many features that Scrivener offers. Don’t think of this as a tutorial, but more like a revival tent sermon.

## THE BIG RED BINDER

Along with chapters, scenes, and sections, structuring a book includes organizing bits of news items, interviews, outlines, or research on twelfth-century samurai. So where to put it all? Back in the day, you might have had a big ring binder — mine was red. Scrivener beautifully arranges all these folders, breaking the book into smaller, more manageable chunks, and puts them in the, aptly named, *binder*.

The manuscript is kept separate from the research notes, character studies, or whatever else you need to build the work. Chapters can be broken down into scenes, or gathered in sections.

You can build a Scrivener structure from scratch, or use their helpful templates for various types of writing: novel, short story, nonfiction proposals, stage play, and screenplay.

### WHERE DID I PUT THAT?

Whether your book is one long document or a series of files and folders, trying to find certain details is a huge challenge (*what colour was that rocking horse?*). Instead of searching and then scrolling through hundreds of pages until you get a blood blister, Scrivener highlights all the chapters, sections, and scenes in the manuscript where the word or phrase appears. This allows you to skip through the book, and along with a robust find-and-replace engine, solving those nasty continuity errors in revision is incredibly easy.

Speaking of revision — Scrivener's split screen feature allows different parts of the book to be viewed at the same time. This can be used in all sorts of ways: research notes on the bottom, manuscript on top, or notes from an interview, or a map of the area showing the best taco stands in Puerto Vallarta. While writing this article, I had notes from various blogs in one of these screens. MS Word also allows you to arrange files on your monitor, but I can hear you screaming as you try to line them up just right.

Bonus points: when you open Scrivener, you land on the exact spot you last worked on, with all your notes in place. If you've ever closed a three-hundred-page manuscript by mistake and then had to find your place, you know what I mean. Oh, and Scrivener is always saving. Always.

### SO MUCH RESEARCH

No matter the subject matter of your novel or nonfiction work, you gather a lot of research. As mentioned, you can place material such as maps, notes, long cut-and-pastes from Wikipedia, and even audio and video into a folder in the binder section. A few years ago, while researching a novel set in Upper Michigan, I drove down there to immerse myself in the landscape. As I drove, I made recordings into my iPhone (*safely in the cup holder*). On my return, I dumped all those recordings into a research folder, and like everything in Scrivener, it was easily accessible on one screen.

### FOR THE COLOUR-CODED FOLK

In what's called the *Inspector*, there is an area for notes, which can appear in every chapter or section. I found this very helpful while making various passes, noting which parts need more work, or demand further research.

If you frequent the office organization aisle in Staples looking for another set of colour stickers, then the *Outliner* feature is for you. This section has a range of tools that help you get organized, such as colour labels, word-count targets, revision-status markers, and progress bars. As a novelist, I use this feature as a motivator — but I think the Outliner is even more key for nonfiction writers because it is perfect for comparing the lengths of different chapters or sections and checking off which topics have been covered.

### THE BIG PICTURE

One of the biggest challenges in working on a long narrative is getting the whole book in your head. Two of my favourite Scrivener features are the *Synopsis* and *Corkboard* sections. Similar to a set of recipe cards, the corkboard allows you to view the entire book in

small squares that contain either the synopsis or the first few lines of the chapter or scene. With this big picture view of the structure, I can easily swap whole chapters by a click and drag, and bam... the visit from the mysterious aunt happens in Chapter Three, and the evil chemistry teacher doesn't show up until Part Two of the novel.

### PUBLISH THAT THING

One of the most powerful features of Scrivener is its ability to output to a number of file types. This is incredibly useful if you are interested in indie publishing print or ebooks. I've used this for both my self-published titles and for getting work to beta readers and editors. I can easily output for Kindle, Kobo, PDF, or a variety of MS Word formats. This level has a steeper learning curve, but as you get deeper into the possibilities, you discover ways to create chapter heads, drop caps, running heads, and all the stuff that make books pretty. Scrivener helps you create a beautiful, professional-looking book, complete with uploaded covers and front and back matter.

### THE ULTIMATE FOCUS BUTTON

I've left the best for last, and this is the reason I would spend five times as much on this program. There is a little button in the upper right corner called *Full Screen Composition* mode. When engaged, how can I explain... everything drops away. Think of it as your partner just took the kids to the grandparents for the day, the traffic outside is silenced, and someone, perhaps Jonathan Franzen, soldered the Wi-Fi connection on your laptop (*yes, he did this*). All the other screens fade, and you are left with a blank page... and you simply write. Yes, yes, my MS Word lovers (*are you still reading?*) you probably can do this, but there is something so lovely about how Scrivener does it. Like I said, Scrivener knows writers. They know that we love nothing better than for someone to bring us a cup of tea and a biscuit, adjust the room temperature, and take the dog out for a two-hour walk, so we can just write.

*Craig Telson has written five novels and a bucket of short stories, which have been published in Canada, U.S., U.K., and South Africa. His new crime novel, Manistique, is out this summer and was written, like all the others, in Scrivener. He tweets, probably too much, @ctelson.*

*TWUC Note: All opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, who is not employed by Scrivener. The Writers' Union of Canada does not endorse or recommend any commercial products, processes, or services.*

### HOW TO GET STARTED

There is a bit of a learning curve with Scrivener, and I am mindful that in my day job as an illustrator/designer I've had to learn much more complex programs. Still, I think the best way is to get the software and dive in. The creators have a ton of excellent tutorials on their website ([literatureandlatte.com](http://literatureandlatte.com)), including a ten-minute overview that shows you the basics. Another resource is Gwen Hernandez, who has an excellent book in the Dummies series, and offers tips and advice at her blog ([gwenhernandez.com](http://gwenhernandez.com)). If you're still stuck, shoot me a tweet, I've probably got Scrivener open.



# We're All Ears: Is Podcasting for You?

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BY PHILIP MOSCOVITCH

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For about a year, my old friend Jay tried to convince me we should start a podcast. I was hesitant. There are so many podcasts out there. Does the world really need ours?

**B**ut as the months went by, I started to think maybe Jay was right. So we hashed out ideas until we finally hit one we liked. It's called *Dog-eared and Cracked*, and it's a conversation about books. For each episode, one of us recommends a book for the other, and then we discuss it. We don't have a ton of listeners, but it's fun, I get to read books I wouldn't otherwise, and it's good for our friendship.

There are all kinds of reasons for writers to consider podcasting — and many different types of writer/literary podcasts. You may want to extend your platform, connect with other writers, or share material from your books or research in a new medium. And if you do want to get into podcasting, will you do storytelling, reviews, or interviews, or maybe do original drama? I can't tell you if you should have a podcast, but this article does lay out different approaches and considerations, and formats.

\* \* \*

Jeff Pearlman says he started podcasting "as a lark." Now, nearly 200 episodes later, it's become a constant in his schedule.

Pearlman, who lives in southern California, is the bestselling author of nine sports-related books. His weekly podcast is called *Two Writers Slinging Yang*. (The title comes from Pearlman's mishearing of the Lauryn Hill lyric "poppin' yang".) The format is simple: He chats with a guest about some aspect of writing for about 45 minutes. His list is eclectic — ranging from a screenwriter specializing in Hallmark movies, to memoirists, reporters on various beats, and even hip-hop artists talking writing.

## PODCASTING BY THE NUMBERS

Podcasting has gone from a niche pastime to mainstream form. A February 25, 2021 *New York Times* story by Ben Sisario notes there are about two million podcasts currently available — a number that has tripled in just two years. A 2020 study on Canadian podcast listener habits, from audio market research firm Signal Hill Insights and advertising network The Podcast Exchange, says 18 percent of Canadians listen to podcasts weekly. And they average nearly an hour of listening time per day. The study says 27 percent of Canadians are monthly listeners.

There are podcasts about any topic you can imagine — from the mainstream (current affairs, true crime, movies), to the very niche (anesthesia, fermentation, bonsai).

If you're a writer, should you have a podcast? Pearlman recommends it: "There is no excuse for not starting a podcast. It gets you out there.... The number one benefit by far is my Rolodex has expanded times a million."

Pearlman believes podcasting has become a tool much like blogging was in the early 2000s. "I was a huge blogger, and in a lot of ways, podcasts have replaced the blogs," he said. And his motivations for launching *Two Writers Slinging Yang* were similar to the reasons he started a blog. "I wasn't doing it for commercial reasons," he said. "I love being a writer, and I truly love talking about writing.... It gave me an opportunity to do that."

### EXTENDING YOUR REACH

Sarah Sawler, a Halifax-based writer and Conundrum Press publicist, has spent part of her pandemic year preparing to launch two podcasts. The author of three nonfiction books, Sawler sees podcasting as a way to extend her reach between books and as a potential way to find new stories.

Over the last year, Sawler said she's felt a bit like she's "spinning my wheels," and podcasting is "a great way to still do some writing-adjacent stuff and get stories out there.... It can help me maintain an author platform."

She wants to solo host a podcast of writer origin stories — extending a column she used to write for *Atlantic Books Today* — and plans to co-host a show on people's most interesting on-the-job stories, with circus performer and former hip-hop artist Vanessa Furlong.

### MAKE A PLAN

Pearlman didn't have a plan for his podcast before launching. "I never had a goal, I don't want to get on a network, or have a producer," he said.

Podcast producer Katie Jensen, who runs Vocal Fry Studios in Toronto, recommends against that approach. She doesn't see podcasts as analogous to blogs since "blogging is a lot less work." If you're going to spend time on a podcast, "the biggest mistake you can make is buying the gear, pressing 'record,' and assuming that as soon as you turn on the mic brilliance will flow," she said.

Jensen says it's important to think about the format of your show — for instance, solo storytelling or interview — how long each episode will be, if you want your podcast to run indefinitely or if you're setting a fixed term. She said, "You wouldn't start writing a novel without making a plan ... It's the same effort you would make when planning a piece of writing."

### DON'T PLAN ON MAKING MONEY

Sawler's plan is to start slow and see where things go. If she has enough interest, she might set up a Patreon and use the money to hire freelancers to sound edit.

Pearlman's podcast has a sponsor — throwback sports merchandise shop 503 Sports — but he said they are sponsors "in the loosest interpretation. ... They sometimes send my kids t-shirts or jerseys."

The reality is that the number of podcasts, combined with increasing corporate control of the market, mean it's hard to get noticed. So it's important to know what success means to you.

"What is the value of a listener to you?" Jensen asked. "Would

you be excited by 50 listeners, or 100, or would you only be happy if you have 500 listeners?"

Pearlman agrees. "The odds that you're going to become this runaway hit — it's a longshot," he said. But, he added, "You're allowed to do things because they are fun and enjoyable. ... If you enjoy it and you're learning a new skill, it can't hurt."

### PITFALLS TO AVOID

The technical side of podcasting may be more accessible than ever (see sidebar), but that doesn't mean no skill is required. Jensen thinks audiences have become less forgiving of poor audio quality. "It's really easy to see the mark of an amateur," she said. "You can tell based on equipment quality, how fast someone gets to the point, and microphone technique."

Pearlman said when he first started he didn't do any sound editing, but now he spends about three hours a week "slicing it down and smoothing it out."

Jensen thinks a podcast that's well-planned and well-executed can "exist as a piece of storytelling that complements or pivots your career." But she emphasizes that just putting it out there is not enough. "You have to give them a reason to listen.... You really have to make it worth their time."

*Philip Moscovitch co-hosts the books podcast Dog-eared and Cracked and has produced and/or hosted podcasts for clients including the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 and the Halifax Examiner news website. He is the author of the book Adventures in Bubbles and Brine, which Moosewood Cookbook author Mollie Katzen called a "beautifully written book — at once a travel memoir, a weave of personal histories, and an inspiring recipe collection." He lives outside Halifax.*

### TECHNICAL BASICS

To start podcasting from home, the bare essentials are a microphone, a computer, editing software, and a hosting service. Jensen said "technique matters more than price point" when it comes to gear. Don't just plug in your mic and start talking. Instead, find out what you need to do to optimize its performance.

Since you won't want to just upload your raw audio, you will need audio editing software. This ranges from free (like Audacity or Garageband) to much more sophisticated packages like ProTools, which runs several hundred dollars. Pearlman uses Adobe Audition.

You should also think about your recording environment. Large, cavernous rooms will produce poor sound quality. Consider setting up an informal home studio. Many Canadian public libraries also offer recording studios and gear you can book free.

A hosting service allows people to listen to your podcast and can easily get it onto platforms like Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Jensen likes Simplecast ([simplecast.com](http://simplecast.com)) and says if you sign up with the promocode ONSIMPLECAST you'll get your first two months at half price.

To learn more, Jensen recommends Transom.org, which has helpful articles on an array of topics, including interviewing technique, setting up a home studio, and interviewing during the pandemic. Look for them under the "Techniques" tab.



# Why Write?

BY WAYNE GRADY

Unlike my two least favourite questions — “What are you working on these days?” and “What’s your novel about?” — “Why do you write?” is a question writers often ask themselves and to which we try to come up with plausible answers.

The question isn’t “Why bother?” — it’s more a matter of what we’re trying to achieve by writing. In his 1961 essay, “Writing American Fiction,” Philip Roth wrote that the task of American fiction writers was “to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality.” This task, he said, was made difficult by the fact that much of American reality was already so “ridiculous” that “the actuality is continually outdoing our talents.... The daily newspapers fill us with wonder and awe; also with sickness and despair.” How does a writer sift through “the fixes, the scandals, the insanity, the idiocy, the piety, the lies, the noise?” And that was in 1961, the year after Kennedy defeated Nixon, when neither El Salvador, Iraq, Afghanistan, nor Donald Trump had happened. What on earth would Roth think about American reality now? Well, we

know, because in a 2017 *New York Times* interview he more or less threw up his hands: Trump was “a massive fraud” and his presidency “the most debasing of disasters.” But what would he make of it in a work of fiction? That we’ll never know because Roth died in 2018.

There are many reasons not to write (lack of talent, lack of ambition, nothing to say) and only a few good reasons for writing. In “The Professor’s History,” a short story published in 1995, Claire Messud goes some way to providing one of those reasons. The story concerns a French historian living in Algeria during the Second World War. In his research, he comes across evidence that French soldiers stationed in a remote part of Algeria a hundred years earlier had massacred a group of Algerian rebels. The professor travels to interview villagers to see if what he read was historically accurate. When he explains his

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# There are many reasons not to write (lack of talent, lack of ambition, nothing to say), and only a few good reasons for writing.

mission to the administrator of the region, the official dismisses it: "Tell me," says the official, "what good is it? What difference will it make, to tell your story, even if it is true?"

In other words, why write?

The professor is coldly infuriated by the question and doesn't even try to respond to it. He continues into the hills, talks to herdsmen and villagers, and discovers the evidence he seeks. The incident took place as described in the journal. On June 19, 1845, a French regiment had rounded up 500 Algerian villagers, sealed them in a cave, built huge bonfires at the cave's entrance, and suffocated everyone inside.

Vindicated, the professor returns to his library in the city, determined to begin work on "the book."

Before he gets very far, however, his project stalls. Perhaps the administrator's words have weakened his resolve — it doesn't take much to paralyze a writer with self-doubt. Whatever the cause, the professor stops writing. Again, there is that withering question: "Even if he were to finish his book, who would read it?" So, why write?

Earlier in his research he had discovered, in the library basement, a large jar filled with "tinted liquid, in which swam a swarm of pinkish, shrimp-like creatures." These were the severed ears of the Algerian rebels that the French soldiers had cut off and preserved in 1845. Who knew why they did it and why the jar had been kept for so long. Restlessly roaming the streets of Tangiers, the professor thinks again about what is in that jar. When he first found it, "unable to confront this horror, he had chosen to ignore it: it had been as easy as shutting a drawer." But now the image haunts him.

The story ends with the professor, hunched in the dusty library basement, reading his book to the jar of ears: "For them, the professor decided at last, he would tell his story."

And there we have a possible answer to the question, "Why write?"

For them.

Now that I, too, am writing fiction, I think the reasons we write embrace both Roth's public and Messud's private motive, includes both Stephen Daedelus's pompous "to forge, in the smithy of my soul, the uncreated conscience of my race," and Edwidge Danticat's intensely personal "writing has been the primary way I have tried to make sense of my losses, including deaths." Both of those, yoked together, form one reason.

In a hamlet down the road from where I used to live, there

were twin brothers; one was named Tim and the other, Tom. They were in their forties when I knew them, living alone in a house on the main street, and surviving by doing odd jobs about the village. No one, not even they, knew which one was Tim and which one was Tom, and so they were both called Tim'n'Tom. When they were five years old, some wag had put a firecracker in either Tim's or Tom's ear and lit it, and thereafter that Tim'n'Tom was "not right in the head," as the hamlet put it. The other Tim'n'Tom looked after both of them as, indeed, did the whole hamlet.

I have a photograph of one of the Tim'n'Toms: a thin, middle-aged man straddling a bicycle beside a highway, grinning at the camera. The photograph was taken by a photographer who lived in their hamlet and who often visited ours to sit on a bench in the shade beside the river. When she was younger, she'd been in a car accident, and had lost a leg, and when she sat on the bench in our village, in the shade beside the river, she sometimes took off her artificial leg, leaned it against the bench, and went to sleep. One afternoon, when I and my four-year-old daughter were walking along the river, my daughter ran off and came back carrying the photographer's artificial leg. By the time we reached her bench, my daughter carrying the leg under her arm, the photographer was awake, sitting calmly watching the river flow by, and when she saw us, she started laughing. We all laughed. The three of us sat on her bench beside the river and laughed. My daughter watched the photographer reattach her artificial leg, and we walked with her up to her car and said goodbye. It was shortly after that that I bought her photograph of Tim'n'Tom.

I included Tim'n'Tom as two characters of that name in my novel *Up From Freedom* as a pair of trappers who seem to be living simply at the fork of a river in northern Kentucky, a place I called Twin Forks. They change my main character's life in a profound way: They alter the nature of his search for his son from a private endeavour to a public mission.

Buried somewhere in that anecdote is the reason I write.

Wayne Grady's third novel, *The Good Father*, was published in April by Doubleday. His first novel, *Emancipation Day*, won the Amazon.ca First Novel Award in 2013 and was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. His translation of Yara El Ghadban's novel, *I Am Ariel Sharon*, was published earlier this year by Anansi, and a translation of his second novel, *Up From Freedom*, translated by Catherine Ego, will be published later this year by Mémoire d'Encrier. He lives with his wife, Merilyn Simonds, in Kingston, Ontario, and, when travel resumes, in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

# Dispatches

NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

WELLNESS /

## At the Entrance of a Dark Alley

BY CAROLE GLASSER LANGILLE



*“Do not feel lonely, the entire universe is inside you,” the poet Rumi says.*

Though we don't fully understand the conflicting voices inside us, when we record these voices, we begin to better understand ourselves and others. This is why I wanted to give writing workshops in a prison in Nova Scotia and why I handed out poems by Rumi and other poets.

In one of the workshops, I read the poem “Two Songs” by Campbell McGrath in which he talks about the burden but also the necessity of letting black, silent trees into our hearts. I asked participants what they thought these trees represented and why we must allow them to enter. One man said, “Black, silent trees, that's the blues. Once you feel something, you can't unfeel it.”

The blues, which originated in the southern U.S. by African Americans, is certainly a conviction to sing in the face of great burdens. His analogy was powerful. We talked about vulnerability and how, paradoxically, being vulnerable can make us stronger. I quoted Lao Tzu: “Nothing is softer than water, but it wears away rock. To compel the unyielding, it has no equal.”

When we began the workshop, several women said they didn't understand poetry. However, as we talked about specific poems, they responded with enthusiasm and realized they knew more than they thought. Often they had insights I did not have though I'd read the poems many times. This is why I love poetry: We glean something new each time we read a great poem. Its surprising language wakes up the reader. Sometimes a hidden voice inside us reveals itself as we identify with the poem's narrative or theme.

In one of the women's writing workshops in prison, we read “On the Nature of Understanding” by Kay Ryan. It's a tall, thin poem

with three or four words on most lines, as if it were a snake about to attack. The poem, about thinking you've tamed a wild thing, ends

So it's  
strange when it  
attacks: you thought  
you had a deal.

“That poem says a lot; like being here in prison, thinking you've come to terms with it, and then you get so frustrated and feel miserable and trapped,” one woman said. She was in her early twenties, and like many others in the workshop, had been in jail before, was from a historically marginalized community and poor.

In Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, a character says, “In scattering ... your kind deeds, you are giving away ... part of your personality and taking into yourself part of another ... a little more attention and you will be rewarded with the knowledge of the most unexpected discoveries.” This is also true of poetry. Discovering hidden parts of oneself when reading and writing poems helps us connect to others. Sharing discoveries is generous.

I've given writing workshops to people giving up addictions, teens in crisis, homeless youth, women who had cancer, men and women serving time in prison. In all these workshops, poems have initiated the most intimate conversations. I've been deeply moved by responses to poems and insights they inspire. I've witnessed how a poem can induce the most reticent person to share their story. Often others have had similar experiences. But even if this is not the case, simply by sharing an experience, a person feels less alone. Rumi told us this would be so, and though we did not understand why, we see it is true.

Poetry: “three mismatched shoes at the entrance of a dark alley,” is how the poet Charles Simic describes the form. It's not that poetry makes the dark alleys or the black, silent trees go away. Poetry reveals that our fears and our hopes are messages, and receiving a message is a gift. We want to celebrate by giving gifts of our own.

Below are abbreviated lines from “North Carolina,” the first stanza of “Two Songs,” by Campbell McGrath:

“The more you allow the figures of black, silent trees  
... into your heart, the greater the burden you  
must carry ... and the stronger your conviction to sing.”

Yes, the stronger our conviction to sing. Precisely because our journey is so unfathomable and final, poetry, ultimately, is indispensable.

*Carole Glasser Langille's recent book, Doing Time, is a nonfiction account of her time giving writing workshops in a prison in Nova Scotia. Her fifth book of poetry, Your Turn, will be published in the fall of 2021.*

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TRANSLATION /

## Lost and Found in Translation

BY KEVIN CONNERY



Stephen Mitchell from 2011.

I don't want to put too much stock in closely reading the opening lines of a 15,693-line poem; however, for the sake of illustrating my point, this is a worthwhile place to start.

These two openings are similar — quite similar — but they are just different enough to show how something as small as individual word choice can affect a story.

*The Iliad* is the first great tragedy in the Western tradition and from the very first lines, we know that it is a story about rage and its consequences. Whatever language we use to describe Achilles and his rage, the story doesn't change — Patroclus will still die, Achilles will still kill Hector, etc. — and yet, just as every actor who plays Elizabeth Bennet brings unique nuances to their performance of the character, the specific language translators use changes how we experience *The Iliad*.

If we look at these two openings, we see that each translator is plucking at a slightly different chord.

In Mitchell, Achilles' rage is deadly. A worthy and dramatic adjective, which we might read as meaning only the most obvious definition: that his rage is deadly because he is a great warrior. But the line is, the deadly rage that caused the Achaeans such grief — not the Trojans whom he is fighting. Here deadly is foreshadowing all that is to come; from the first argument with Agamemnon to the deaths of so many of his compatriots and even his beloved Patroclus, everything that happens is the deadly consequence of Achilles' rage.

Fagles, while similar, makes clear what Mitchell merely suggests. He explicitly introduces fate.

His Achilles is doomed.

To my ear, Fagles' version is the more tragic of the two. That doomed, bracketed by commas, reads like the boom of a bass drum and seems to echo in the line and, indeed, throughout the poem. In both translations, we know that sorrow is coming, but only in one version has the translator cursed the hero right from the start.

There are a million more differences (big and small) between these and every other translation of *The Iliad*, and I do not argue that any one is better — that is a matter of taste. Instead, I hope that by scrutinizing these details we can see how small choices matter.

There is no right or perfect way to translate a story, just as there is no right or perfect way to write a sentence. If anything, the existence of so many different translations shows us that there are myriad ways to tell any story, and while we, as writers, may find this daunting, it should also challenge us to scrutinize our own language and work to find the best way to tell the stories that we want to write.

*Kevin Connery is a writer, editor, and artist. He has a B.A. from the University of Toronto and an M.F.A. from Columbia University. His work has appeared in THIS Magazine, The Ontario, XTRA, and is forthcoming this year in FEEL WAYS: A Scarborough Anthology.*

*No matter what they're translating, all translators have a simple goal: they are trying to tell an accurate version of the story that they're adapting.*

For some translators, accurate can mean literal; for others, accuracy is more a matter of tone or style. Whatever the case, since language is slippery and rarely translates neatly, translators must make choices.

I am not a translator, but I like reading translated works for a couple of reasons. The first is that, like poets, translators pay particular attention to language in a way that not all writers do.

The second is that all translated texts are iterative, meaning there is always at least one other version with which they can be compared — and often there are many.

If we look at the Classics, and especially the really popular ones, like *The Iliad* (which, at my last count, has been translated approximately thirty-five million times), we find many different versions by different translators. These versions allow us a unique opportunity to look at how the same story works when it is told differently. So, in addition to the accuracy of the language, these versions allow us to compare the effect that language has on a story, and to consider how the translator's choices, even small ones, can change our perception of a text.

Consider these:

Rage — Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles,  
murderous, doomed, that cost the Achaeans countless losses

and

The rage of Achilles — sing it now, goddess, sing through me  
the deadly rage that caused the Achaeans such grief

These are two popular translations of the opening lines to *The Iliad*. The first is by Robert Fagles from 1990 and the second is by

PERSEVERANCE /

## By the Numbers

BY MICHELLE BARKER



- Set a daily word count. Make it realistic so you'll be willing to show up to do it more than a few times. Three hundred words is an easy target, and chances are you'll end up writing more. If you want to add a component of accountability, post your daily word count on social media or share your progress with a writing friend. Nothing makes you show up to your desk like the prospect of a public confession. You can also keep track of your growing word count with a spreadsheet and set it to show how close you are to your total goal.
- Try the Pomodoro technique: 25 minutes of uninterrupted time focussed on a chosen task — no distractions. Yes, that means no email and no texting. After each 25-minute segment, take a short break (a stretch or a snack); after four of them, you're allowed to take a longer break.
- Try Seinfeld's system of X's on the calendar. Post a calendar on your wall that includes the entire year on one page and put an X on the days you hit your writing goal. You'll soon create a chain, and you will probably enjoy watching it get longer. The key? Don't break the chain.
- Keep track of the time you spend working. You might discover (as I did) that your BIC time is not as high as you thought. I use Toggl to both categorize and track my time (since I wear several hats as a writer/editor/teacher), but there are many online time-tracking programs around.

*Keeping your BIC (Butt in Chair) is critical for all writers, but when the writing gets hard, most of us need a trick for pushing through — else we're likely to end up scrolling through our Instagram feeds instead of figuring out how to end a chapter. Quantifying my writing progress is a strategy that has worked for me.*

As a writer, I'm definitely not a numbers person — but when it comes to motivation, put some numbers in front of me or some X's on a calendar, and I'm guaranteed to work harder.

Apparently, it's not just me. There is something called the progress principle. In the *Harvard Business Review*, Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer found, "Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. And the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run."

The alternative — staring at a blank page or screen until you decide you'd rather clean the bathroom than write that difficult scene — well, no one wants that.

A sense of progress becomes especially important when you're facing a long project that requires you to show up on a daily basis. It's dangerously easy to lose heart if you don't have the feeling you're moving forward. But if you can see that progress, it accrues. The more progress you see, the more likely you are to show up at your desk the next day.

So, how do you set this process in motion? Here are some strategies that work for me:

My experience with these strategies has proven that I'm eminently foolable. Instead of telling myself I have to write a difficult scene, I say I'm just sitting down to write my thousand words. No biggie. Less pressure; fewer excuses. And I do like seeing those X's gather momentum on the calendar. Maybe we never truly outgrow our love for stickers and gold stars.

Naturally, there are pitfalls. Hitting the Toggl button every time you sit down can become a distraction in itself. I've noticed myself getting, um ... long-winded sometimes to hit my word count. And then there's the time I spend staring out the window thinking about my book. We all know that time counts, no matter how unemployed it makes you feel. But how do you categorize it?

As with everything in writing, these strategies aren't one-size-fits-all. See what works for you and discard what doesn't. What matters is that it gets your butt in the chair and carries you through to those all-important final words.

*Michelle Barker is an author/editor from Vancouver, BC. Her novel The House of One Thousand Eyes (Annick Press) was named a Kirkus Best Book of 2018 and has won numerous awards including the Amy Mathers Teen Book Award. Her newest novel, My Long List of Impossible Things, was named a Top Ten Best Bets by the OLA. Michelle holds an M.F.A. in creative writing and works as a senior editor at the Darling Axe.*

INTROVERSION /

# Too Much of a Good Thing

BY JOSHUA KEEP



*Days slip into weeks, the calendar blissfully empty of social obligations. This time, the empty calendar is not a choice, but an obligation. An introvert's own version of heaven can easily become a cage, cutting us off from inspiration, creativity, mental wellness, and joy.*

I was in trauma therapy when COVID-19 descended upon us.

One of the coping mechanisms my therapists talked about was seeing positives in negative situations. As an introvert during the lockdown, that felt easy. As my therapy group moved online, there was no more trudging through a Newfoundland winter to get to sessions. As my calendar started to clear up for days, weeks, months, leaving me more time to write and enjoy life at a casual pace, I felt an increasing release of pressure.

Sure, we had several trips planned for writing conferences or pleasure that had to be cancelled. But cancelling events can be intoxicating for an introvert, and I heaved a grateful sigh as the chaos seemed to loom far away.

Waking up early each day, enjoying a cup of tea, then getting to write as I pretended the world stopped at my walls? It suited me just fine.

They say we introverts get our energy from downtime, away from others, and I thought, "I could do this forever," cozying up in my home office. My partner and I have worked from home for years, co-authors under the pen name Alexis Abbott, so very little changed for us.

And then they closed the parks.

I was prepared to sacrifice for my community, but I'll admit: That rankled.

My primary source of inspiration always came from being in nature. Whether it was just letting my mind wander as I walked hand-in-hand with my partner through lush green trees, or getting

ideas from caves we explored, enjoying the natural world was the font of creativity I always returned to.

But suddenly, it was walking around dreary neighbourhoods, still littered with the detritus of winter. Only piles of rubbish were left around, filling the gaps between barren trees.

I'd written one horror novel. *Her Descent* was an attempt to exorcise some demons of my trauma. But suddenly I felt like I should make a more permanent switch to the genre.

For seven years, my partner and I have made a good, full-time living writing romance, but how was I supposed to think of such passion and beauty when everything was bleak, walled off, and isolated?

That spring was the first realization that maybe a lifetime of being an introvert wasn't enough to prepare me for a seemingly endless lockdown and isolation. And the less I interacted with people, spoke at conferences, or gave speeches, the less it appealed to me at all.

Like a lot of childhood abuse survivors, books were my most vital emotional outlet. Escaping into the lives of fictional characters had been such a relief since I was a child. I would devour books, usually hiding beneath a tree in a lilac grove in my town. As I grew up, reading wasn't enough. I had to write my own stories; I had to take control and decide for myself the fate of these characters that gave me an escape.

Lockdown took me back to that grove of lilac trees where I'd hide from the terror of home and cocoon myself in the aroma, the vibrant colour of the delicate flowers. But as lockdown wore on, and control was stripped from me, I was reminded of the shock and upset when my sanctuary, my hidden refuge, was chopped down to make room for a dreary, asphalt parking lot.

I thought I was taking back control by embracing isolation, by willingly making my world smaller, more contained. Instead, I found myself struggling to be as creative when I spoke to nobody new, saw nothing but dead wood and concrete.

My desire to be safe, isolated, and in control of my very tiny bubble tempted me to go too far, my creativity dying, collapsing in on itself like a dying star.

I love writing, I need it. But it can be an arduous process. And for me, part of that gruelling exercise is forcing myself reluctantly out into the world to experience and ponder all it has to offer. Giving that up meant sacrificing a piece of my creative power, but recognizing how life has changed under COVID-19, and how I've changed, has given me clarity and perspective. This year, we've decided to move to my rural hometown, and one of the first things I intend on doing is planting a lilac tree and finding a way to blossom with a renewed appreciation of my need for community.

*Joshua Keep is a happy husband, childhood trauma survivor, and award-winning, bestselling author. Writing under the names Alexis Abbott and J.E and M. Keep with his wife and partner of nearly 20 years, he tackles passion, love, fantasy, and even horror. From the rocky shores of Newfoundland, he's learned a deep appreciation for the beauty and intimidating scope of our world.*

RESILIENCY /

## Embodied: A Tale of Resilience

BY REBECCA DIEM



*This year has challenged me in ways I did not know I could survive.*

It has been a year since my partner left. Not by choice, only the best of the decisions available to us.

Jimmy is in Australia, trying to come home since last March when I put him on a plane with hand sanitizer and prayers. We are close to that epic reunion kiss, but we've been telling ourselves just a few more weeks for months now. He is always in tomorrow, while I am stuck in today. This is hard, but we continue to fall in love with each other ever more deeply. Our love is resilient, and for that I am grateful. One day he will be home, and we will write the next chapter of our lives together.

I am grateful for many things these days, but it was not always so. There was a period of time where I lost my joy entirely last year. Anhedonia, they call it. It sounds like the name of a flower. *My anhedonias are blooming nicely this year.*

Depression is now a familiar friend; I have made room to care for her. Medicines and therapy and knowing when the laundry truly does not need to be folded.

I am a gentle caretaker of my mind. I have learned to be.

In July of 2020, I posted an update for my patrons and readers. I felt compelled to share what I was going through, when I thought I was through the worst of it. At the time, I had been reflecting on recovery, on how I had managed periods of grief and stress before in my life — the shape of it that I recognized, and all the ways it was frighteningly new.

*It's difficult to create when you're in a state of fear. Your sympathetic systems are activated, alert. There is no time for dreamy imaginings when your focus is on identifying and analyzing the very real threats to your own well-being and your loved ones. It's also very difficult to notice that you're having a*

*breakdown when the world is breaking down along with you.*

*Resiliency is a muscle that you exercise. It is not innate; it grows and becomes stronger with experience.*

*Resiliency reminds me of the muscle memory I had as a dancer. When the music would play, my limbs would flow through the movements without conscious thought. It felt familiar: I have been here before, and I have survived, and I have thrived.*

*Resiliency requires empathy, for yourself and for others. It is the tend-and-befriend stress response, a nurturing, caring, community-based response. We are in this together, we are isolated but not alone.*

It is almost March again as I write this. Eight months (EIGHT MONTHS!?!?) later, I can still access a sense of peace when I read those words. We are experiencing a collective trauma, and our individual traumas are unevenly weighted by race and class and age and geography. But on the other side of trauma, there is opportunity for growth.

Exercise is hard, but I fear my muscles — my creative muscles and my bodily ones — may atrophy if I do not. I bribe myself with takeaway Americano mistos and butter tarts from my local café for my daily perambulation, walking around my block, double-masked, smiling at passersby, grateful for the laugh lines gradually etching themselves around my eyes.

I walk, I stare at the trees, I appreciate my neighbours' gardens, I listen to the cacophony of birds, I stretch my muscles against the tension and pain that haunts me, like a kettle about to boil, a keening whistle at the edge of my conscious mind.

We all must move ourselves through this Great Reset. Some will have an easier time than others, and they must do their part to ease the burden on everyone else.

If we think of our resilience as a muscle, then we must remember to feed it and tend to it like a muscle. Think of athletes, with protein-rich diets and ice baths: What will give us the energy and fuel we need? What will aid in our recovery?

We are at that point in an exercise class where you cannot possibly lift your arms again — and yet you do, again and again, breathing in time with the music as a helpful instructor shouts encouragement and praise. We cannot possibly endure; and yet we do.

This past year has been a struggle. I am doing my best. I know that you, the one reading this, are doing your best, too.

Reflect on what fuel you need for your resilience. Many of the mechanisms we relied on in the past are not accessible right now — I miss my grandparents, I miss coffee shops, I miss not-so-secret concerts in crowded lofts, I miss dinner parties with friends, and most of all, I miss my partner's touch.

Photography is one way that I fuel my recovery, taking my Instax SQ6 and my grandfather's Polaroid on adventures, playing with the imperfection and instant gratification of film photography. I love these images best for their flaws. Light leaks and purple hues. Creating tangible souvenirs of moments in a

# **It sounds like the name of a flower. My *anhedonias* are blooming nicely this year.**

year where memory fades and time flows erratically.

I crave nature, outdoors, and inside my home. So many of us have reached for plants and gardens in this time, nurturing life and nurturing the part of us that also yearns to create. Creation is an act of rebellion against stasis. Think of all the tiny succulents now marching across windowsills in defiance of this plague, tiny sparks of life to ward off the darkness.

The greatest fuel I have discovered, however, is vulnerability and connection. To say: I am not in crisis, but I am not okay. To hold space for your own pain and the pain of others. To feel less alone. To discover new shapes of yourself in your aloneness.

My therapist is a wonderful woman who permits me to talk and talk and talk, and ever so occasionally shares insights that hit like a lightning strike. I described doing a virtual panel that I worried would be draining but was actually invigorating and fun. She asked me to notice how my energy had shifted over the course of our call.

*Anhedonia.* My desperation for happiness was a thirsting vampire, insatiable and predatory. I need, I need, I need, I need. The good medicine was in sharing, in illuminating the path for others, in being seen.

Recently, I led a writing workshop for a group of grade eights in Manitoba's Learning From Home School. I taught some simple practices to read like a writer, analyzing first chapters and supporting each other with helpful feedback. I showed them how to find the gems in each others' writing, to polish them until they shine. I gave them my energy and my insight and my time and my validation.

In giving, I felt my own reserves replenished, like some kind of arcane magic. Like a practice of faith.

These young dreamers gave me hope. They showed their courage, their adaptability, their resilience and determination. If you are a student, or know one, you'll understand what I mean. Despite the limitations and frustrations and setbacks, they are doing their best. They are in that beautiful space where their aspirations have not been fully tempered, and the world they graduate into will be unlike any other.

I told them to re-read the first chapter of beloved books and of their own writing. To ask: *What do we know? What are we excited to find out?*

As a community of creators, this experience is likely to infuse our work forevermore, like the net of fascia over our muscles and bones. What do we know about ourselves now, after a year of

isolation? And most importantly, what excites us as we write the next chapter?

Resilience is not just about what you, personally, are able to bear. Resilience is how our community makes it through this crisis, alchemizing our pain into our creative work.

What gifts will you nurture and share?

*Rebecca Diem writes hopeful speculative fiction and poetry. Her work includes contributions to Tor.com and Kobo Writing Life as well as the indie steampunk series Tales of the Captain Duke. Born a small-town girl, Rebecca now lives in Toronto and is the resident communications wizard at The Word On The Street literary festival. She is the grateful recipient of a 2020 Explore & Create grant from the Canada Council for the Arts for her current book-in-progress, Greenlight.*

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**COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE**

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"Now you know why I call it Podcast from a Closet."

# News

THE LATEST ON WRITING AND PUBLISHING  
IN CANADA AND BEYOND

## PUBLISHING AND BOOKSELLING

### Quebec Publishing by the Numbers

Quebec's publishing and bookselling industries have thrived during the pandemic. While there were about 20 percent fewer books published in 2020, revenue increased by 5.8 percent. Quebec publishers' sales increased by 11.2 percent in December 2020, while sales for foreign publishers only increased 1.2 percent.

Booksellers in the province have seen an increase in sales of approximately 5 percent. In 2020, book sales increased almost 6 percent, and sales in independent bookstores increased by 18 percent.

### Canadian Booksellers Thriving

Odin Books, a mental health bookstore in Vancouver (and one of the few in Canada), has had increased sales since early 2020. Co-owner Catherine Ellsmere has noticed new clients who are facing mental health concerns for the first time. They purchase books to better understand conditions such as post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS), depression, and anxiety.

The #GiftAtlantic holiday campaign saw three regional publishers in Eastern Canada partnering with Indigo Books for an online and in-store marketing campaign aimed at selling local content. As reported in *Quill & Quire*, a list of thirty-two local books was featured, and all sales expectations for the campaign were exceeded.

### Canadian Booksellers Closing

In 2019, after 35 years in business, a Toronto community institution, Parentbooks, a specialty store catering to all things parenting and child-related, made the difficult decision to close their doors. Their final sales were in January 2021.

## New Independent Presses

Laberinto Press, founded by Luciana Erregue, publishes literature from underrepresented and ESL writers, and literature in translation in Western Canada. Labertino is the first indie press in Western Canada with this focus.

Hush Harbour Press, opened in June 2020, highlights intersectional authors. Co-founders Alannah Johnson and Whitney French use storytelling that emphasizes short fiction to imagine new Black futures.

## New Literary Agencies

Two literary agencies have recently opened in Canada. Ballpoint Literary Agency was founded by David Bidini, Warren Sheffer, and Janet Morassutti. One of Toronto's newest agencies, Otter 5 Literary, was founded by Olga Filina, Ali McDonald, and Cassandra Rogers. They are accepting submissions from all genres.

## DIGITAL NEWS

### Sale of Canada's Wattpad

The 15-year-old digital storytelling platform Wattpad has been sold to a South Korean technology firm for \$600 million. The sale is expected to accelerate Wattpad's development of intellectual property on the story-sharing site and bring broader global notice to select writers who work through Wattpad.

While Wattpad has always been a primarily free sharing-site for writers to access critical readers, recently it has experimented with paid content. According to Wattpad, rights to the works on the site are retained by the authors.

## SUPPORTING UNDERREPRESENTED WRITERS

### Annick Press Mentorships

Children's book publishing in Canada has historically been dominated by white authors. To increase representation, Annick Press has created a mentorship program for LGBTQ2SIA+ writers, Black writers, Indigenous writers, writers of colour, and writers living with disabilities for three-month paid mentorships. They plan to work with nine mentees per year.

### Promoting Intersectional Authors

Several websites and podcasts highlight writing by underrepresented writers. Waubgeshig Rice and Jennifer Davis have launched Storykeepers, a book club format podcast that talks about Indigenous books and authors.

The Asian Canadian Writers' Workshop promotes Asian Canadian authors and issues related to the Asian Canadian community. The website includes magazine articles and podcasts ([aaww.org](http://aaww.org)).

Canada's VoicEd Radio ([voiced.ca](http://voiced.ca)) is a podcast platform covering myriad issues in culture and education. Check out Anti-Racist Educator Reads with Colinda Clyne and Third Space with Jen Cort on [voiced.ca](http://voiced.ca) for discussions about equity and inclusion.

American podcast Minorities in Publishing discusses diversity among authors, people in the book publishing industry, people in literary fields, and other professionals working in-house ([minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com/?og=1](http://minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com/?og=1)).

The Black Chick Lit bi-monthly podcast showcases books by Black women authors.

## PRIZES AND AWARDS

### Writers' Trust of Canada

The Writers' Trust of Canada's new Balsillie Prize for Public Policy awards \$60,000 to a writer whose books "advance and influence policy debates on social, political, economic, and cultural topics relevant to Canadians." Businessman Jim Balsillie sponsored the award as part of his "new \$3 million commitment to the Writers' Trust."

In addition, the Writers' Trust has renamed their top fiction prize after two

of the founding members of both The Writers' Union of Canada and the Trust, Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson. The prize will now be valued at \$60,000, and the very first recipient will be announced in September 2021.

### Nova Scotia Poetry

Poet Maxine Tynes is being honoured with a new award named after her by the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia. The biennial Maxine Tynes Nova Scotia Poetry Award will be given to the best book of poetry by a Nova Scotian writer.

### Rethinking Publishing Conventions

Author, poet, writing teacher, and editor Betsy Warland is being honoured with a new prize in her name. The VMI Betsy Warland Between Genres Award, from Vancouver Manuscript Intensive, will be given to an author who rethinks conventional genres, formats, and the ways we read in 2021. The prize of \$500 will be given out at a ceremony in the fall (two honourable mentions will also be named at the ceremony).

**DISCOVER ALBERTA BOOKS**  
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—Jason Purcell  
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Calgary arts council Edmonton Alberta

## GRIEVANCE SERVICE FOR MEMBERS

All TWUC members can access a grievance service on contract-related issues such as non-payment, late-payment, lack of royalty statements, or other contractual breaches.

The Union's work on grievances has proven to be quite persuasive, and can involve correspondence on the issue with public funding bodies as appropriate.

Learn more about this valuable members' service at [writersunion.ca/filing-grievance](http://writersunion.ca/filing-grievance).

# Member News & Awards

## Announcements

**Tonya Liburd** had two stories in professional science fiction and fantasy magazines in January: a reprint of “The Ace Of Knives” in *Apex Magazine* and an original story, “10 Steps to a Whole New You,” in *Fantasy Magazine*.

**Frances Boyle**’s latest book, *Seeking Shade*, was published by The Porcupine’s Quill in August 2020. The short story collection follows Frances’s two books of poetry (most recently *This White Nest*, from Quattro Books in 2019) and her Rapunzel-infused novella, *Tower*, published in 2018 by the Sunshine-Coast-based press, Fish Gotta Swim Editions.

**Molly Cross-Blanchard**’s debut book of poetry, *Exhibitionist*, was released last month with Coach House Books. Amber Dawn says, “Again and again [Molly] places the erotic beside the mundane so that both are transformed.” Mallory Tater says, “*Exhibitionist* is a merry-go-round circling back to the tender, awkward parts of ourselves.” And Katherena Vermette says, “If this book had a flavour, it’d be caramel.”

A departure for **Heidi Greco**, her latest book, *Glorious Birds: A Celebratory Homage to Harold and Maude*, celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of one of her all-time favourite films, *Harold and Maude*. Heidi considers possible inspirations for screenwriter Colin Higgins and also offers insights about the film’s director, Hal Ashby. In words that are every bit as “unstuffy” as ones Maude herself might use, Heidi reminds us of just how glorious this beloved film is.

**Lesley Choyce** (author) and Doug Barron (CBC producer) have released their first poetry/music recording project in 25 years. Pandemics prompt creative artists to do unusual things to keep their spirits soaring, and this was the case for two of the original SurfPoets from the 1990s. *The Trouble With Everything* (produced by Pottersfield Press and Harbourmaster Music) is available from Nimbus Publishing and Bandcamp.com. A number of videos of the work appear on YouTube. Lesley lives at Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia, and Doug lives in Halifax.

**George Melnyk** has edited an anthology of COVID-19 poems by seventy-five Canadian poets titled *We Are One: Poems from the Pandemic* published by Bayeux Arts (Calgary). The poems were

written during the first wave in the spring and summer of 2020. The themes are family, nature, distancing, quarantine, isolation, grief, resilience, reverie, love, and laughter. The purpose of the anthology is to capture a full range of the pandemic experience from shopping to being alone. It draws on the work of both famous and new poets to memorialize the difficult times through which we have lived. The book is available through your local independent bookseller or from the editor ([georgemelnyk.com](http://georgemelnyk.com) or via email [georgemelny75@gmail.com](mailto:georgemelny75@gmail.com)).

**Rick Revelle**’s fourth book, *Algonquin Legacy of The Algonquin Quest Series*, will be published by Crossfield Publishing. Dundurn Press published *I Am Algonquin* (2013), *Algonquin Spring* (2015), and *Algonquin Sunset* (2017). Used in Native Studies classes across Canada, the series follows an Omàmiwinini (Algonquin) family unit as they strive to survive starvation, warfare, and the elements in the 1300s on pre-contact Turtle Island. Crossfield has an option on *The Elk Whistle Warrior Society*, which hopefully will be out in 2022, about a society of Native women that hunt down criminals who harm Native women and children.

*Letters Across the Sea*, from the #1 bestselling author of *The Forgotten Home Child*, **Genevieve Graham**, was released in April. On the eve of war, a young Protestant girl and her Jewish neighbour are caught up in both an illicit love story and the terrible wave of hate sweeping the globe. From the rampant anti-Semitism that gave rise to the largest ethnic riot in Canadian history (Christie Pits Riot), to the Canadians fighting in the Battle of Hong Kong and surviving the brutal Japanese POW camps, comes a powerful love story inspired by a little-known chapter of Canadian Second World War history. Perfect for fans of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*.

**Shirlee Smith Matheson** of Calgary, Alberta, won the Rainbow Prize (for senior entrants) for her short story “Memories from Muskwa Creek” in the Bedford Writing Competition in England. An email from Philip Carey, Administrator, stated the prize comes with money (500 British pounds!), an actor narrating the story on YouTube, and an anthology to be published in both electronic and paperback formats. A virtual presentation video by the author outlining the development history of the story was sent on OneDrive to augment the reading. Shirlee thanks the Alexandra Writers Centre Society for advertising the Bedford Writing Competition in the Alexandra Writers Centre Society newsletter. Shirlee also has a short story titled “Chanting Faint

Hymns" accepted for the forthcoming AWCS 40th Anniversary Anthology.

Toronto writer **Gilbert Reid** published in December 2020 and January 2021 under his imprint, Twin Rivers Productions, an eight-volume science fiction series, *Adventures of V*, featuring a half-alien, half-human vigilante vampire heroine, V, whose mission is to protect the human race from itself and even from her. In the first months of 2021, he published, under the pen name Gwendoline Clermont, a romantic erotic trilogy, *The Shaming of Gwendoline C*, *Gwendoline Goes to School*, and *Gwendoline Goes Underground*. In 2019, Reid published two volumes of literary short stories, *So This is Love: Lollipop and Other Stories* (previously published by Key Porter in Canada and St Martin's in the U.S.); and *Lava and Other Stories*, as well as a 666-page historical novel, *Son of Two Fathers*, set in the Italian Renaissance, published by House of Anansi Press, and co-authored with the late Jacqueline Park. Reid's website is [gilbertreid.com](http://gilbertreid.com).

**M.A.C. Farrant** is pleased to announced the publication of *One Good Thing — A Living Memoir* from Talon Books of Vancouver, BC. A collision of memoir with the living, exuberant, and vulnerable world, the book is written in sixty-four short epistolary chapters to gardening columnist extraordinaire, Helen Chesnut of Victoria's *Times Colonist*. Each section expands on one of her gardening columns and represents a search for hope and appeasement in a rapidly changing and often perplexing world.

**Jason Russell's** *Leading Progress: The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, 1920 – 2020* ([btlbooks.com/book/leading-progress](http://btlbooks.com/book/leading-progress)) was published in October 2020 by Between the Lines Books. Jason's new book, *Canada, A Working History*, was published this March by Dundurn Press ([dundurn.com/books/Canada-Working-History](http://dundurn.com/books/Canada-Working-History)).

**Meghan J. Ward** has expanded into the children's book genre with the title, *The Wonders That I Find* (Rocky Mountain Books), released on March 30. The story follows young Geneva on a hike with her parents and zooms in on the wonders she finds along the trail. For more details, please visit [thewondersthatifind.com](http://thewondersthatifind.com).

Ontario writer **Marie Prins**'s mid-grade children's novel *The Girl from the Attic* was published by Common Deer Press in October 2020. This time-travel story won silver in their 2019 Uncommon

Quest competition. Her memoir pieces and poetry appear in the Spirit of the Hills Writers' anthologies *Hill Spirits II*, *II, & IV* (Blue Denim Press) as well as on her website ([marieprins.ca](http://marieprins.ca)).

## Awards

The Canada Reads 2021 long list included three books by TWUC members: *Yiddish for Pirates* by **Gary Barwin**, *Tilly and the Crazy Eights* by **Monique Gray Smith**, and *Jonny Appleseed* by **Joshua Whitehead**. Joshua's *Johnny Appleseed* was the winner — the first book by an Indigenous author to win the annual competition.

**Souvankham Thammavongsa's** *How to Pronounce Knife* was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Awards in the fiction category.

The USBBY list of Outstanding International Books includes five Canadian titles by members: *Story Boat* by **Kyo Maclear** (Tundra Books); *The Lady with the Books* by **Kathy Stinson** (Kids Can Press); *Maurice and His Dictionary* by **Cary Fagan** (Owlkids Books); *Music for Tigers* by **Michelle Kadarusman** (Pajama Press); and *Hunted by the Sky* by **Tanaz Bhathena** (Macmillan/Farrar Straus Giroux).

Saskatchewan member **Louise Bernice Halfe – Sky Dancer** was appointed to a two-year term as the Parliamentary Poet Laureate.

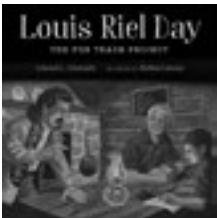
**Betty Keller** was named recipient of BC Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence.

This year's Library and Archives Canada Scholar Awards, created to recognize remarkable Canadians who have made an outstanding contribution to the creation and promotion of our country's culture, literary heritage, and historical knowledge include members **Margaret Atwood** and **Charlotte Gray**.

Yale University's Windham Campbell Prizes have been awarded to two members: **Dionne Brand** won one of two fiction prizes, and **Canisia Lubrin** won one of two poetry prizes.

Sudbury writer **Kim Fahner** won first place in the League of Canadian Poets 2021 National Broadsheet Contest with her poem "Beekeeping."

## New Members

- Mary Barnes**, *What Fox Knew, At Bay*, Press, 2019
- Kate A. Boorman**, *What We Buried*, Henry Holt & Co, 2019
- David Bradford**, *Dream of No One but Myself*, Brick Books, 2021 (forthcoming)
- Ali Bryan**, *The Figgs*, Freehand Books, 2018
- Nevin Buconicj**, *Starting Your Own Business: An Entrepreneur's Guide*, Digital Adventures, 2018
- Sarah Chauncey**, *P.S. I Love You More Than Tuna*, Sounds True, 2020
- 
- Robert Chrismas**, *Sex Industry Slavery: Protecting Canada's Youth*, University of Toronto Press, 2020
- John Corr**, *Eight Times Up*, Orca Book Publishers, 2019
- Sareh Donaher**, *Flee - Pistachios in my Pocket*, At Bay Press, 2022 (forthcoming)
- Dylan Doose**, *Fire and Sword*, Dylan Doose, 2015
- William Ellis**, *The Theory of the American Romance: An Ideology in American Intellectual History*, University of Rochester Press, 1989
- Deborah L. Delaronde**, *Louis Riel Day: The Fur Trade Project*, Theytus Books, 2020
- 
- Beth Follett**, *Instructor*, Breakwater Books, 2021
- 
- Lorraine Mary Gane**, *The Blue Halo*, Leaf Press, 2014
- Jill Goldberg**, *"Death's Long Embrace," Against Death: 35 Essays on Living*, Anvil Press, 2019
- Isabelle Groc**, *Sea Otters: A Survival Story*, Orca Book Publishers, 2020
- Lisa Hrabluk**, *New Brunswick*
- Underwater: The 2018 Saint John River Flood**, MacIntyre Purcell Publishing Inc., 2018
- Allan Francis Hudson**, *The Alexanders Vol. 1 1911–1920*, Kindle Direct/South Branch Scribbler, 2020
- Elio Iannacci**, "Low Country Suite," *Here & Now: An Anthology of Queer Italian-Canadian Writing*, Accenti Press, 2021
- Patrick Johannesson**, "Vincent and Charlie," *Parallel Prairies*, Great Plains, 2018
- Craig Jones**, "Finding better solutions to the opioid crisis," *Inroads*, December 2020
- Ian Kent**, "Caretaker Return," *The Prairie Journal*, December 2020
- Alec Lavictoire**, *The Black Cup*, INTense Publications Inc, 2020
- Allice Legat**, *Walking the Land, Feeding the Fire: Knowledge and Stewardship Among the Tlicho Dene*, University of Arizona Press, 2012
- Dilys Leman**, *The Winter Count*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014
- Canisia Lubrin**, *The Dyzgraphxst*, McClelland & Stewart, 2020
- Randy Lundy**, *Field Notes for the Self*, University of Regina Press, 2020
- Stella MacLean**, *Bringing Emma Home*, Harlequin, 2018
- Josephine Matyas** (co-author), *Chasing the Blues: A Traveler's Guide to America's Music*, Backbeat Books, 2021
- M. R. Noble**, *Karolina Dalca, Dark Eyes*, The Wild Rose Press, 2020
- Patricia McCowan**, *Honeycomb*, Orca Book Publishers, 2014
- Laura McKay**, "Picture book shares a sense of maternal legacy along with interactive imagery," *Prairie Books Now*, Issue 77 Fall/Winter 2020/21
- Sally Meadows**, *When Sleeping Birds Fly*, Siretona Creative, 2018
- Thomas Merritt**, *The Science of Coffee*, University of Toronto Press, 2022 (forthcoming)
- Annette Pateman**, *Spectrum*, Blurb, 2020
- Norman Reed Paterson**, *Mining Geophysics: A Canadian Story*, Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy, and Petroleum, 2019
- Kent Peacock**, *The Quantum Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, Greenwood Press, 2008
- Kimberly Pittaway**, *Toufah: The Pageant, the President, and the Woman Who Inspired an African #MeToo Movement*, Penguin Random House, 2021 (forthcoming)
- Marie Arden Prins**, *The Girl from the Attic*, Common Deer Press, 2020
- Caroline Routh**, *IN STYLE: 100 Years of Canadian Women's Fashion*, Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993
- Safia Saleh**, *Islamophobia: Deal With It*, James Lorimer Publishing, 2020
- Jacob Scheier**, *Letter from Brooklyn*, ECW Press, 2013
- Rebecca Silver**, *Slayer*, In the Land of Birdfishes, HarperCollins, 2013
- Sami Jo Small**, *The Role I Played*, ECW Press, 2020
- Grazina Kristina Sviderskyte**, *The Hurricane Captain*, artSeria, 2006
- Gillian Sze**, *Panic!*, ECW Press, 2017
- J. Torres**, *Planet Hockey*, Scholastic Canada, 2020
- Floria Varnoos**, *Ketogenic Diet: Eating Low*
- Carbohydrate Diet**, Mehrandish, 2018
- Marcia Walker**, "The Somatics of Water," *The New Quarterly*, 2019
- Meghan J. Ward**, *Lights to Guide Me Home*, Rocky Mountain Books, 2022 (forthcoming)
- Cristy Watson**, *Living Rough*, Orca Book Publishers, 2011
- Carl Watts**, *I Just Wrote This Five Minutes Ago: Observations on Poetry Culture in Canada*, Gordon Hill Press, 2023 (forthcoming)
- Matthew James Weigel**, *It Was Treaty / It Was Me*, Vallum, 2020
- Colleen Winter**, *The Gatherer*, Rebel Base Books, 2019
- Ash Winters**, *Run Riot: Ninety Poems in Ninety Days*, Caitlin Press, 2021
- Bob Wiseman**, *Music Lessons*, ECW Press, 2020
- Rebecca Wood Barrett**, *My Best Friend is Extinct*, Orca Book Publishers, 2021
- Alex Zimmerman**, *Becoming Coastal*, Seaworthy Publications, 2020
- Sarah Ziolkowski**, *Narcotic Love: In and Out of the Coma of Narcissistic Abuse*, Amazon, 2019

# In Memoriam

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## Joan Levy Earle

BY MAGGIE WHEELER

**1944–2020**

Joan Levy Earle passed peacefully on November 28, 2020, at the Ottawa Hospital – Civic Campus, at the age of 76.

Joan was an artist, author, and entrepreneur, well-known and respected across the United Counties of Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry. She was a proud supporter of the City of Cornwall and especially Cornwall small businesses.

As an artist, Joan leaves behind a half-century of prolific and memorable creative works, focussing mainly on oils and watercolours. She held her first showings in Toronto as a young woman. These continued regularly throughout her life, culminating in a special fiftieth anniversary exhibit at the John M. Parrott Gallery in Belleville in 2017.

As a writer, Joan was a member of the Union for many years. Her interests were eclectic, and she penned a total of twelve nonfiction books, including *Jack's Farm*, *Train Ride to Destiny*, *The Legacy of C.W. Kye*, and *Grandma's Best Friend*.

For twenty-five years, her special messages called “Hopelines” appeared weekly in the *Cornwall Standard-Freeholder*. The column ran in Saturday print editions for over twenty years, making her one of the publication’s longest-standing contributors.

With her late husband Jack Earle, Joan owned and ran a bookstore in Cornwall called the Sanctuary. For many years, it was a hub for readers, writers, and artists. Joan was an energetic and constant supporter of local talent.

Joan’s strong faith in God and the living presence of Christ enabled her spirit to be joyful and optimistic. She deeply valued the friendship and love of her widespread church community. Joan was a frequent and popular contributor to the Jesuit blog *igNation*. She also wrote a regular column for the *Canadian Messenger of the Sacred Heart Magazine* for over twenty years and worked as the publication’s associate editor from 2007 to 2014, when the magazine ceased publication.

Joan loved her life and all of the people and experiences that made it so full and rewarding. Every life she touched, she made better.

## Frank Koelsch

**1943–2020**

Information Technology executive Frank Koelsch became a member of The Writers’ Union of Canada after publication of his book *The Infomedia Revolution* which examined the growing social and economic impact of computing technology. Frank transformed the influence of his bestselling book into a consulting and presenting practice that took him around the world. In hundreds of presentations across Europe and Asia, he discussed and analyzed trends and changes in the information technology sector. He advised many boards and IT companies, and founded both Gartner Group Canada and the Everest Group Canada, IT research and consulting firms. Frank died in late 2020.

## Allyson McKay

**1944–2020**

Author of the acclaimed short story collection *Human Bones*, Dr. Allyson McKay had a varied career that included consulting work in First Nations, a professorship at the University of Victoria, and work at the BC Ministry of Advanced Education. In an obituary in the *Victoria Times Colonist*, Ally is fondly remembered for her broad and eclectic knowledge, her humour, her singing in various community choirs, her skill at mixing up a margarita, her dancing, and her love of cats. Born in Oakland, California, and living in various communities across North America, she was fluent in Spanish, French and English, and is described as “a very gifted writer.” She began work on her Ph.D. thesis on Francis Bacon (McGill University, 1981) while snowed in at a farmhouse in rural Ontario during the great Blizzard of ’77, skiing herself out for supplies when necessary. Allyson died in Victoria in December 2020.

# Geoffrey Ursell

BY DAVE CARPENTER

**1943–2021**

The Saskatchewan writing community has lost a major player. On the morning of February 21, Geoffrey Ursell passed away in Saskatoon after a lengthy struggle with Parkinson's disease. He is remembered fondly by many writers, friends, and readers, most of whom wonder how he accomplished so much for the literary community.

Geoffrey distinguished himself in so many ways that he defies any of the usual categories. He was a fine athlete, excelling in fastball, golf, and badminton. He was a promising scholar, graduating with a doctorate from the University of London. He published pieces in prestigious outlets such as the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Saturday Night*. His early career as an English instructor was foreshortened by his plunge into writing. He had solid successes as a playwright, novelist, poet, and short story writer, and he won national awards in at least two of these genres, including the Books in Canada First Novel prize for *Perdue*, or *How*

*the West Was Lost* (1985). He was a prolific songwriter, and many of his songs were either recorded, or they showed up in his musicals.

Geoffrey was also an energetic community builder, for which he received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. He was a very active force in the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, especially as president in the late 1970s. Along with poets Robert Currie, Gary Hyland, and his wife Barbara Sapergia, Moose Jawians all, he was a co-founder of Coteau Books, which became one of the leading publishing houses in Western Canada. Throughout his writing and publishing career, he gained a reputation as a meticulous and prolific editor of literary works. Geoffrey remained with Coteau books as publisher until Parkinson's brought on his retirement in 2013. He served them for thirty-eight years.

Saskatoon claims Geoffrey, as does Regina, and Moose Jaw, his original hometown. If, as some people claim, Moose Jaw is the literary capital of Saskatchewan, it is because of writers like Geoffrey and Barbara, Robert Currie, Gary Hyland, Ken Mitchell, Bob Calder, and many others, who immortalized Saskatchewan with their published work and distinguished themselves in wider arenas. And of all these writers, Geoffrey Ursell, a man of many hats, was the most versatile. Socially, he was a man of few words, but when he spoke, his words were incisive and sometimes prophetic. His vision for Saskatchewan writing was unwavering, and his labours bore much fruit. He will be sorely missed and long remembered.

THE WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA



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