

WRITE

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**THE WRITERS'
UNION OF
CANADA**

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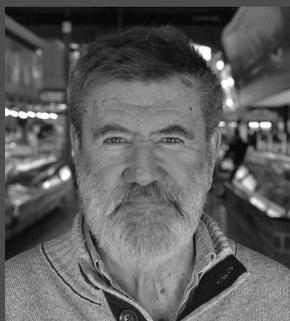
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TIM WYNNE-JONES PHOTO: MARK RAYNES ROBERTS; KAMAL AL-SOLAYEE PHOTO: GARY GOULD

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I'm hoping this report will perhaps provide a different kind of introduction. I wanted to begin with an anecdote from several years ago. I was working as a mentor at the Writing Studio at the Banff Centre for the Arts, one of my favourite freelance gigs.

A bunch of us were about to head down from the Centre into the town for a reading at the public library. As I walked down the hallway, I ran into a couple of the writers I was mentoring. They kindly asked if they could purchase copies of my latest book of poetry in advance of the reading.

Those of you who publish poetry know that no opportunity to sell a copy of your book should ever be missed. I dashed into my room, feeling slightly hurried and flustered, and grabbed a couple of extra copies. I handed them over to the writers, hastily scribbling down my autograph and what I thought was an appropriate quick comment with an appropriate flourish, and gratefully pocketed the cash.

By the time I'd made my way down the mountain to the library in town, having successfully dodged real elk and imagined cougars, I'd pretty much forgotten about the sale. So when I walked into the library lobby, I was surprised to be given a wry welcome from the writers who'd just bought the books. I believe they burst into pretty raucous laughter, accompanied by a bunch of other writers who'd joined them.

When I asked what was up, they asked me whether I remembered selling and signing my books. Indeed I did, please and thank you. Well, did I also remember what I'd written above my signature? Probably something like "best wishes." More laughter. One of the writers handed me my copy open to the page I'd signed.

I'd signed my own name correctly — got that bit right. But below my name I'd written, *Lovely to meet me*.

Hence the laughter.

I offered to buy back the book and replace it for free with a more appropriate, less egotistical note. No dice. I then offered to

pay twice the cover price and replace the book. Still no dice. The story, needless to say, lived on at Banff — I imagine it being told and retold as an example of writerly self-regard and myopia, which it was.

Lovely to meet me.

I guess we are always meeting ourselves in our own work, and that might not be a bad thing. And of course we do mostly aim to exceed our self-absorption and self-focus and to meet others as well, even the other in ourselves. We are kind of an obsessed group of people, given how lonely and peculiar our occupation is, generally.

And here's where I come to one of my goals as Chair of the Union. In my two years on National Council, I acquired a much broader understanding of who our membership is. Yes, we are obsessed and we are self-focussed and sometimes we're overly self-regarding. But members are distinguished by a hunger for or at least an understanding of community and the value of community, and I believe that it's this quality that makes the Union such an important and useful institution. Over and over again I'm knocked out by the generosity and great-heartedness of the people who give to the Union, even if only by paying those (sometimes painful) annual dues.

I am hoping to play a role in expanding the Union to include more early career stage writers. Because of my position at UBC, I came to know as students many writers whose energy and talent inspired and sustained me. Many were the first in their family to go to university. Many spoke with voices we haven't heard enough from. I don't see enough of them as Union members, and I'd like to see that change. I'd like to see the composition of our membership better reflect the larger writing community. One of my goals is to make sure these new writers are aware of all the Union has to offer and of the steps we have been working hard to take that will ensure that writers at all stages of their career and from every background and experience feel welcome here.

As we emerge from the pandemic and its losses and deprivations, I hope we can continue to expand and enhance the community spirit that has given us so much over these hard months.

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Writing Rights

Written Arguments

By John Degen



Despite the winning case backed by mounds of evidence launched by Access Copyright against York University in Federal Court in 2013, those close to the process have always been looking at the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) looming far off at the end of that long legal road.

The more cynical among us might even say the education sector's strategy was always to reach the SCC, with the hope the highest court's authority would justify the ambitious gamble of removing an entire paid supplier from their budget (without removing the supply). The most cynical among us decided education was simply trying to extend the legal delay as long as possible in order to bleed our collective dry before it could win against obvious injustice.

Well, on May 21, 2021, a full eight years after the legal battle began, Access vs. York finally had its hearing before the nine Justices in Ottawa. Of course, in this time of pandemic, the Justices were alone in their ornate chamber while all the disputants Zoomed in to present their arguments. It was a bit of an anti-climax for me to be watching the hearing from my home-office desk in comfortable clothes rather than besuited on a hard bench in Ottawa, but I'll take it. Access Copyright, having made deep cuts to its staff and budgets, and with the support of its affiliates, is still standing, and even expanding its work into innovative testing of future markets for creative work. York, on the other hand, continue to let their unpaid bills pile up in the hope a mighty wind might come to blow them away.

If you attended the TWUC AGM and heard Claire Gillis' keynote, you know that two questions were considered by the SCC on that day: Is York's copying an example of "fair dealing?" And are tariffs set by the Copyright Board mandatory? York had to argue the former, and Access, the latter. It's fair to say neither side was given a smooth ride by the Justices, who take the opportunity of a live hearing to test legal arguments at their weak points. Hard questions were asked, and unthinkable outcomes suggested.

For Access Copyright, the hurdle to overcome was the fact that nowhere in the founding legislation does it literally say that Copyright Board tariffs are mandatory. That may be the spirit of

the law; it may be the only logical scenario for such a regulatory body; it may be as plainly obvious as the need to move one's thumb from a nail's head before striking with a hammer. But if the majority of Justices would prefer to see the word "mandatory" before declaring something mandatory then, Ottawa, we have a problem.

For York, the challenge of their fair-dealing appeal was the simple, daunting fact that all the evidence presented in the lower court proved the unfairness of their claim. And at the Supreme Court, you can't re-argue against the evidentiary record. To this observer, York's tactic was a lot of arm-waving and finger-pointing off to the side, so that maybe the Justices simply wouldn't see the mounds and mounds of illicit copying in front of them.

No matter the rough ride Access Copyright may have experienced on May 21, their written argument was solid and strong, and thanks in part to TWUC's work on the international scene, the global writing and publishing sector had their back, appearing as intervenors to make sure the SCC understood this was not just about semantics, that the world was watching, and that most other countries would never endanger their cultural sector in such a reckless way.

There's no predicting how the SCC will rule on these two questions. We've all been surprised and disappointed before at this stage, so I will not be laying any bets. What I do know is that even the best possible outcome for Access Copyright will almost certainly not eliminate the problem of unlicensed, unpermitted copying in educational settings. For that, we need greater clarity from Parliament on the law's purpose — maybe they could throw the word "mandatory" in there a few times — and a change in attitude from those who run educational budgets. These are big asks. And so, TWUC will keep working on them.



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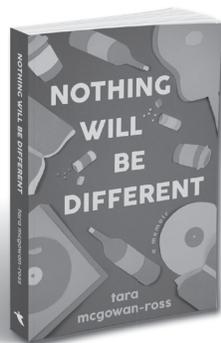
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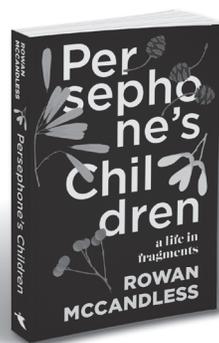


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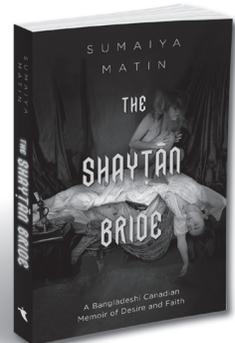
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PRESS

Writer's Blot

WRITER'S PROMPT /

Trying Out Medium

BY SALLY ITO



I'm a middle-aged BIPOC woman who has published three books of poetry, a collection of short stories, a memoir, and a children's book. So why am I trying to publish on Medium?

Medium is an American-based digital publication platform that operates as a hybrid collection of amateur and professional people and publications creating articles and other digital content, and is regularly regarded as a blog host. Medium launched in 2012; I got onto the platform in 2016 when I wrote a biographical essay about the Japanese poet Misuzu Kaneko for *Electric Literature*. When it was accepted, the editor told me to cut-and-paste my Word document into Medium and send it to the publication via that platform. As I did this, I explored Medium. I created an account for myself and did a mini-survey of what I liked to read; this information would then appear on my Medium profile page.

While on Medium, I wondered if I could just self-publish there à la blog style. When I mentioned this to the editor at *EL* at the time, she thought it was an interesting idea — it hadn't occurred to her to use Medium that way. For her, Medium was simply a place to edit work accepted to a digital magazine where the transfer of the content would be more seamless than through email. I did get paid for this piece and through Paypal. But what was significant about publishing this piece online on *Electric Literature* was its wide reach. The essay I wrote on Misuzu Kaneko was the first piece about her in English that introduced her life and poetry to an audience wider than I would get in any print journal.

Flash forward to 2020 and the pandemic. Now isolated, and without blog or website on which to share longer pieces of writing (Facebook Notes had been discontinued), I wondered where I might publish my writing in a format I could share easily with my social media followers/friends and also expose it to that vast readership of the unknown that every writer wants.

I returned to Medium. By this time, Medium had changed. It had become an ecosystem of readers and writers that wrote for each other on varying topics of interest. You could now become a paid member of Medium and have your work behind a paywall

where you could earn money on stories based on the reading time and “claps” given by other paid members. You could submit your work to journals and if they accepted it, you would become part of the roster of that journal's writers and could submit to them again. You could also self-publish and have your work read by “followers.” In the meantime, you could read the work of your editors to get a better sense of their sensibility and preferences.

Since I have a lot of unpublished work that has been rejected by print journals in Canada, I decided I would try submitting them to journals on Medium. At first, one journal I tried — *The Junction* — showed interest but said my piece was too long, so I shortened it and it got published; I became one of that journal's writers. The piece got a readership of strangers I could actually gauge and moreover, develop a following from. In the meantime, I could also share the story with my friends/followers on my social media handles. *The Junction* has since picked up two more of my stories, one of which was then reprinted in a Japanese Canadian newspaper in Toronto.

Are there downsides to this platform? Well, you're not going to make a lot of money on it and because your writing is behind a paywall, your friends will only have access to three of your published pieces on the platform if they don't join Medium (although you do have an option to copy a “friend link” to send by email and Twitter shares are unlimited.) As a reader, I don't find a lot of the articles on Medium interesting — lots of psychology, self-help — but I do enjoy reading the work of the journal editors who have a taste and sensibility I share. The other downside I've discovered is that there are other new platforms like Vocal and Substack that are doing the same thing, which means that Medium is just one of several digital ecosystems out there for readers and writers. Still, my experiment with it has been good, and I'd recommend trying it if you have a lot of unpublished work that you want to get out there.

Sally Ito is a Japanese Canadian writer, translator, and teacher of creative writing who lives in Winnipeg. She has published three books of poetry, a collection of short stories, and was a co-translator for a book of Japanese children's poetry about Japanese poet Misuzu Kaneko. Her latest book is her memoir, The Emperor's Orphans, published by Turnstone in 2018.



Toward Meaningful Change

BY DWAYNE MORGAN

2020 was a year of awakenings. First, we were hit with a global pandemic that would force us to re-examine how we lived and our definition of normal, closely followed by the murder of George Floyd, which sparked a sense of urgency around social justice, BIPOC lives, experiences, and stories.

While trying to figure out how to navigate the pandemic, I, like many in the Black community, didn't share in the awakening that many were having around social justice. The reality that people were waking up to was one that we lived every day, often having our experiences discredited and invalidated.

Everywhere we looked it seemed as though there were discussions happening about systemic racism, anti-Black racism, and White privilege. It wasn't lost on the Black community that we've been trying to have these conversations for years, but no one else saw them as important. Sadly, it took a tragedy, a public execution, to spark the embers of change.

Equity and equality in all aspects of life remain elusive for the Black community, and small steps towards them have never come from the belief that they are just or the right thing to do but always from chaos and disruption. The murder of George Floyd and the

ensuing uprisings were par for the course, challenging the status quo, and shining a light on existing inequities.

The Black community was left exhausted from constantly being asked to open old wounds to offer others a look into what we experience and the privileges not afforded to us. Perhaps the greatest example of privilege was the awakening itself; the realization that one was living with little awareness to the experiences of the Black and Indigenous communities, as well as those of other people of colour.

Despite the exhaustion, we pushed through with a sense of urgency, not knowing how long this window of interest would be open. We had to strike while the iron was hot, to not miss the opportunity to create meaningful change.

In September 2020, The Writers' Union of Canada convened a meeting of Black writers to discuss their experiences and what is needed to make the industry more equitable. The Union has made these recommendations available, and they include such things

as publishing more Black authors, hiring more Black editors, providing all editors with diverse cultural competency training, hiring more Black agents, ensuring that festival programming committees and award juries are culturally diverse, etc.

This all seems reasonable; however, it is not the experienced reality for Black people working in the literary genre. A year after the death of George Floyd forced people to begin having the difficult conversations, are we any closer to seeing lasting positive changes?

I consulted with several people from the Black literary community, many of whom agreed to share if their names weren't mentioned, which is significant, because the threat of making a difficult career path even more difficult is very real. There is often a price to be paid by those who rock the boat. That being said, the general consensus is that little has changed, and much of the 2020 rhetoric seemed performative, as everyone was trying to respond to the moment. The sense of urgency that existed when engaging the Black community in these dialogues has not been matched by any urgency of action.

In an attempt to be on the right side of history, everyone released statements outlining their commitments to the issues at hand but have since gone silent. In one instance, I learned of Penguin Random House Canada's commitment to deliver an updated Anti-Racism & Accountability plan by December 2020, which never materialized. Months later, after being called out repeatedly on social media, the update appeared, leaving members of the community saddened that the update was unlikely to appear if they didn't apply pressure to follow through on promises made. The last thing that the community needs is to be holding people accountable for the actions that they committed to.

Mistakes will be made, and that's okay, but doing nothing is no longer an option.

Looking at the bigger picture, Dundurn Press' Scott Fraser speaks of the threat to Black writers posed by the monopolization of the publishing industry. "When Germany's Bertelsmann completes its takeover of Simon & Schuster, two companies will control the majority of this country's trade market. One of those companies, HarperCollins, is owned by Rupert Murdoch, and if we don't talk about the role that his Fox News plays in putting Black lives at greater risk, then we're not telling the truth. They publish Lawrence Hill with their left hand and pump out the noxious fumes of Tucker Carlson with their right. If push comes to shove, which side will this company be on?"

"As a result of this monopolization, Black writers will have fewer opportunities due to reduced competition among publishers. What's far more dangerous is that Black writers (and readers) are now beholden to the whims of two companies with very dubious track records when it comes to respecting and protecting the rights and integrity of racial/ethnic minorities."

There is little lasting change that can occur without full commitment and accountability. For their part, the Writers' Union convened Black writers to begin the conversation and published a special edition of *Write* magazine with a Black editor and all Black writers to begin the move from discussion to action. The hope is that this was not a one-off, but the beginning of more meaningful integration of Black writers into spaces where they have often been absent.

John Degen, executive director of the Union, reminds me that

"TWUC continues with its industry leadership as we included an equity component in our recent microgrants for mentorships program, published a Black Writers special issue of *Write* magazine, and are embarking on a benchmarking research study of diversity across writing and publishing. We will continue to support more opportunities for Black writers to gather, share notes, and assist each other while working toward expanding the BIPOC Writers Connect program to provide longer-term mentorships, which has proven to be an industry-leading program and has come through the requirement of remote working extremely well. The wider industry has taken note, and what was originally funded by public arts agencies is now almost entirely supported by industry sponsorship, including Penguin Random House Canada. TWUC is committed to continuing and growing the program."

When we speak about the presence of Black people in the literary world, we can often point out that success story that we know, but often find ourselves completely unaware of those who have been forced in to the margins, denied opportunities because "we already have a Black person on staff or have heard the Black perspective already."

When you ask Black people about their experiences in the industry, you find a myriad of responses from great success stories to those whose spirits have been broken; after all, we aren't a homogenous community that think, feel, and experience things in the same way. For instance, there are many who take issue with the BIPOC designation, arguing how uniquely different the Black and Indigenous experience is to that of other people of colour.

What we can agree on, is how far we still have to go to create an equitable industry. Yes, there are things starting to happen, but they're so long overdue that they're hard to focus on and celebrate. We are tired; there is a heavy spiritual and emotional burden that comes from always fighting to be seen, to find a place, to be accepted.

Soon, there will be a new hot topic, and the Black literary community will look back at 2020 wondering if it was all a dream and who will have to die next to create a reminder of the work still to be done and commitments to be fulfilled.

The first step in the right direction is to honour commitments made, not because of pressure from the community, but because you believe them to be the right and equitable thing to do. The process will be long but will begin with meaningful actions to create space, fill voids, and increase the diversity in all aspects of the industry.

We can agree that everyone benefits when there are more voices sitting around the table, shaping what we understand Canadian culture to be. Sadly, we are also all too familiar with conversations amongst ourselves, where we wait, increasingly less patiently, for the actions that should have been sparked by the words.

May our future hold fewer of these conversations and more about the opportunities that we can create collectively for those who will come after us.

Dwayne Morgan is a two-time Canadian National Poetry Slam champion, with thirteen collections of poetry and performances in eighteen countries around the world. Morgan is a 2013 inductee to the Scarborough Walk of Fame and has performed for dignitaries including former President of the United States Barack Obama.



The Invisible Canadian Collection

BY JILLIAN BELL

Many of Carnegie’s first “modern” libraries featured non-book services: swimming pools, billiards rooms. Ancient libraries boasted laboratories, gardens, and maybe, as the fantasy fan in me likes to imagine, dusty catacombs where they kept “the dangerous tomes.”

Modern libraries house public-access computers and were among the first to offer 3D printing services; some feature maker spaces, gaming tournaments, public events, and more. But what about the books? Arguably, modern libraries have always been about more than “just books.”

Having said that, making books available to readers is still libraries’ primary activity. According to BookNet Canada, nearly half of readers (46 percent) discovered new books at the library, behind “word of mouth” (which has long been known as the number one way readers connect with books). In BookNet Canada’s latest *Canadians Reading Canadians* study, “84 percent of Canadian book buyers said they were ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ interested in reading Canadian authors, which is up from 75 percent in 2012.” (Genner, Noah, and Lauren Stewart. “Identifying Canadian Authorship.” *Identifying Canadian Authorship - BookNet Canada User Documentation - BNC Confluence*,

booknetcanada.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/UserDocs/pages/1378508/Identifying+Canadian+Authorship.) But does this mean you can walk into a Canadian library and find yourself awash in Canadian books?

Think about your local library and its collection of Canadian books. How did those books get there?

To begin to answer this question we must first look at what constitutes a Canadian book. Most people would consider a Canadian book to be one written by a Canadian, so where are Canadian writers being published? Certainly some of us have books with the “big five” (Penguin Random House; Hachette; Simon & Schuster; HarperCollins; Macmillan), but most Canadian writers find success publishing with smaller, independent Canadian publishers. Canadian publishers have a focus on publishing the work of Canadian writers. How do we find books to fit that bill?

Enter metadata. “Books have always needed metadata — even

Metadata is one of the most powerful tools publishers have of marketing their books, and one of the most powerful tools distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and libraries have at their disposal to categorise, market, and display books.

before Gutenberg, bibliographies were a necessity” (Richardson, Tom. “Why Do Metadata?” *BookNet Canada*, 10 Sept. 2019, www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2019/9/10/why-do-metadata). While our eyes may glaze over when talk of the data about a book arises, metadata is one of the most powerful tools publishers have of marketing their books and one of the most powerful tools distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and libraries have at their disposal to categorize, market, and display books. As soon as a manuscript is selected for publication, work on the metadata begins: the development of keywords, author bio, title, genre, BISAC codes, etc.. All of the bibliographic information about a book goes into its metadata record, and publishers submit those records to reviewers, wholesalers, distributors, and retailers months ahead of release dates to ensure your book is available wherever readers are, so they can find it, read it, and fall in love with it.

Libraries primarily purchase materials through wholesalers; library acquisitions leaders work with wholesaler sales teams or reps to find books that meet the library’s acquisitions policy requirements. While acquisitions policy in most Canadian libraries will put “Canadian titles” at the tops of their lists, acquisitions teams have shrunk dramatically; in some of the largest library systems in the country, there may only be a handful of librarians whose work is dedicated to purchasing, and how do they *find* Canadian books among the tens of thousands of new titles produced each year? They rely heavily on reviews, wholesaler lists, sales reps, and catalogues - the very places that publishers send their metadata to in advance of publication.

Libraries want Canadian books. Canadian publishers want their books in libraries. Canadian writers want their books in libraries to reach readers and to qualify for the Public Lending Right program. Canadian readers want books by Canadians. Library wholesalers want to provide the best service to their clients, so where’s the disconnect? The disconnect begins with metadata.

How does a wholesaler know if a particular title is written by

a Canadian or published in Canada? Well, chances are good the publisher is sending them ONIX metadata feeds. ONIX is an international standard for the exchange of bibliographic information. There is a field in ONIX that indicates Canadian contributors. (As a very nerdy aside, with ONIX 3.0, the markers that indicate author residency are robust. It would be great if all publishers used contributor place codes.) If these records exist, and if that data indicates Canadian authorship, surely the easy answer is that wholesalers can look at metadata supplied by publishers, and libraries can look at metadata supplied by wholesalers, to make sure they’re getting the Canadian books we all want them to have, right?

We-ell. The data systems that wholesalers use may or may not be ONIX-based (industry standard for publishers and retailers, but not necessarily for libraries and library wholesalers). Libraries and library wholesalers use data systems that, when they were built, didn’t necessarily differentiate regional information. Publishers can flag Canadian content elsewhere in the metadata (author bio perhaps, or in the bibliographic summary), but surely it would be easier just to sort on “author place.” If library wholesalers aren’t using a publisher’s supplied ONIX metadata, many Canadian books start out in the system, invisible as Canadian.

So. Even though regional libraries have acquisitions policies that include directives to request regional and Canadian titles for purchasing lists, those books are difficult to identify because our digital files aren’t speaking the same language. Although Canadian libraries are decentralized entities, local and regional libraries want local and regional content. Library-as-community-builder means including the literature and resources about a community as well as by community members. Library funding and administration happens at the municipal, regional, or, in some cases, provincial level, but libraries develop programming and collections based on what they know of the communities they serve - and they’re very, very good at doing it. Local and regional libraries develop acquisition and collections policy, goals, and priorities based on patron requests,

Even though regional libraries have acquisitions policies that include directives to request regional and Canadian titles for purchasing lists, those books are difficult to identify because our digital files aren't speaking the same language.

circulation, and perhaps most importantly, based on what the community needs and wants. If there's no way for wholesalers to reliably capture metadata that indicates regional or local interest, that book won't show up in the purchasing lists supplied to Canadian libraries on the national metric.

While there is no pan-Canadian public policy covering Canadian libraries that indicates a minimum purchase or collection or circulation of Canadian titles, regional libraries have circulation policies that dictate how many copies of a title are purchased, how long a book remains in circulation, and what triggers repurchase or discard. Books by local writers may find their way into library collections when library users ask for them, or when librarians find out about them through local events, media attention, and reviews. Local histories and books of local and regional interest tend to remain in library collections and in circulation longer than other books, which is good news. But one-off collection building does not go very far in the Grander Scheme of Library Things. Wholesaler and library systems using regional metadata which publishers can already provide through their ONIX feeds is a broader, more effective solution.

For those books that *are* discoverable as Canadian, how many copies of each title would a library purchase? That largely depends on a library's understanding of the needs and wants of its patrons and local connections and media. Circulation policies rely largely on borrowing statistics, and those will vary greatly, even within local branches of a single library system. A large library like Calgary Public might purchase four copies of a new book by a well-known Canadian author, but regional libraries with smaller circulation numbers might not procure more than one. The regional library in Flin Flon might purchase a self-published graphic novel produced by a local area teacher, whereas that title probably wouldn't make it into Toronto Public Library's purchasing list.

In general, library purchases across Canada have gone shallow and wide. Although libraries may purchase a number of new Canadian titles in a year, those sales may represent only one copy

being purchased for one library. Consider that the number of Canadian books purchased each year is about 6 percent of the non-Canadian market; the problem of Canadian invisibility becomes more drastic.

Without easy metadata markers available in library cataloguing systems, librarians and patrons alike have to engage in some digging. In Canadian bookstores in 2019, approximately 18 percent of sales were of Canadian books, while the data on library purchasing shows less than 10 percent were Canadian books. We can see that readers want Canadian books. The disconnect is in discoverability and metadata. Canadian booksellers use ONIX metadata supplied by publishers. Library wholesalers may or may not. If we truly want to help improve the visibility of Canadian books in our libraries, making publishers' metadata work for Canadian libraries is one way to do it.

The more demand there is for Canadian books, the more driven libraries will be to ensure those books show up in their collections; writers should include their local libraries in their own marketing. Ask your readers to ask *their* libraries for your books! The second solution to invisible Canadian books is public policy that supports discoverability of Canadian books from the metadata stage. The trick to buying and borrowing more Canadian books is in being able to find them.

Jillian Bell is a writer and freelance editor living in Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley. She has had work published by CBC, in literary anthologies, and in journals and periodicals. Her work has also appeared in blogs, on social media and websites, and in games-related sourcebooks. She is the Executive Director of SaskBooks, the provincial creative industry association for book publishers in Saskatchewan. At the age of 6, she created her own lending library.

Sources: BookNet Canada; *The More Canada Report: Increasing Canadians' awareness and reading of Canadian books* (<https://morecanada.ca/2018/12/14/report-more-canada/>)



How Organizations Have Adapted During the Pandemic for Financial Accessibility and Inclusivity

BY TIARA JADE CHUTKHAN

In the Spring of 2020, writers' organizations across Canada found themselves needing to adapt their programming and events due to the unforeseen circumstances brought on by COVID-19.

For many, this meant no longer holding in-person mentorship, professional development workshops and literary events. For writers involved, these programs created vital spaces that allowed them to dedicate set time to their projects, learn new skills, and provided spaces that inspired creativity. With our day-to-day life changing rapidly and stay-at-home orders in place, people found themselves with more spare time and wanting to work on the projects they'd put aside due to the demands of everyday life. To continue holding programs and events, organizations quickly turned to virtual spaces like Zoom,

Google Meets, and Crowdcast. These platforms allowed small and large groups to gather in a virtual space and maintain social contact in a safe way.

With the pandemic in full effect, many people lost their jobs or had their hours reduced, resulting in less income. For many writers, writing is not their exclusive stream of revenue. With reduced or fixed incomes, one may not have the means for investing in courses, workshops, or coaching to help get their writing career to the next level. Recognizing this struggle, and the continued obstacles faced in BIPOC communities, many organizations adapted their programming, providing options to

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make them financially or virtually accessible for all who needed it.

Toronto-based writing non-profit Diaspora Dialogues (DD) was just one of many that adapted during this time. For fifteen years, Diaspora Dialogues has held local and cross-Canada mentorship programs, giving up-and-coming writers a chance to work one-on-one with established writers and develop their manuscripts. The programs support writers for short form and long form, giving applicants the opportunity to apply based on their needs. They also hold monthly professional development workshops on a range of topics like writing query letters, marketing, and grant writing. Their mentorship programs and workshops have always been free to apply to and register for, making them accessible to writers in any stage of their careers.

During the pandemic, DD quickly looked for ways to keep their programming going, using Zoom for mentorships and workshops, and streaming platform Crowdfunder for live performances and walking tours. Having created a dedicated community over the years, the events remained full and also welcomed audiences that hadn't been able to participate in the past. DD's events have seen participants in the United Kingdom and U.S.A. since going online, understanding that these events provide resources to those who may not have means or access to workshops, let alone free workshops, where they live. Throughout the pandemic, many writers have also experienced changes in their usual writing spaces or routines. Those who may have had a quiet home during the day for writing or went out to coffee shops and coworking spaces no longer had access to the same environments that foster a creative space. DD's virtual workshops, known as Lunch N' Learns, take place for one hour once a month, allowing participants a dedicated time they can allot in their new schedules. These free sessions ensure that no one is turned away due to lack of funds, especially during this time when people may have less access to disposable income.

Non-profit collective BIPOC of Publishing in Canada also launched a free mentorship program during the pandemic. The program which first took place in the spring/summer of 2020 provided free mentorship to BIPOC folks looking to enter the publishing industry. Their first round of the program was held completely online and encompassed eleven pairings that connected through email, phone, and video. Thanks to the positive feedback of the first cohort, they are back this year with a second round of the program which begins this summer. The organization also hopes to expand their programming in the future and offer more mentorship for those looking to break into the industry.

While we may not be able to gather and learn in the ways we were used to, the demand for these programs continues to grow as people are still looking to build their careers. BIPOC of Publishing in Canada opens their program to anyone with an interest in publishing, not requiring applicants to have prior schooling in the field. This provides an alternative option to traditional schooling for those looking to apply their existing skills in adjacent fields and experiences to an area they feel passionate about. Their focus, much like Diaspora Dialogues, is on the BIPOC community who have often been left out and unrepresented in literary spaces. Both organizations actively pair mentees with BIPOC mentors, being conscious that mentees will need to connect with people who understand the obstacles faced by People of Colour and have navigated them themselves. They can also demonstrate cultural sensitivity when reading and providing feedback on work that represents different cultural groups.

Another Toronto based writing organization, Firefly Creative Writing, has been able to adapt during the pandemic, running programming and workshops virtually instead of at their Danforth studio. Firefly Creative Writing offers affordable workshops led by a diverse staff for all writing levels and genres.

Providing writers with inclusive and financially accessible spaces during the pandemic has continued to make a positive impact on the Canadian writing community, allowing folks to use their free time to develop projects and connect with a community that is invested in their growth and craft.

They have programs specifically designed to create spaces for BIPOC writers and explore topics such as racism, colonialism and more.

Firefly offers six \$400 bursaries twice a year and sliding scale prices for some programs. For emerging writers, cost can often be a burden if they've yet to make money from their craft and support themselves through other work. These options have allowed them to continue pursuing their craft throughout the pandemic while being budget conscious and part of a welcoming community.

In my own experience, virtual writing workshops and mentorship have been a great way for me to take the pressure off myself and create freely. Over the past year, I've attended plenty of workshops, many hosted by the organizations I've spoken of already as well as some hosted by writers in my cultural community. A few of these workshops have explored different topics and writing styles through prompts and other exercises. During these sessions, getting to write freely for myself has allowed me to leave the session with fresh ideas and pieces of writing I've been able to build upon later on. Having a dedicated hour or two, with no pressure to write for a specific purpose, is both refreshing and allows me to see where my pen takes me without worrying about structure and other technicalities. I've come out of each session with pages of notes on what I learned or pages of writing I developed during the workshop.

I've also met many other writers who I wouldn't have known if not for the virtual space. As a writer, building a community of other writers can be very helpful to your growth. Being able to share work and connect with others can strengthen our projects, especially as we get closer to pitching them to publications. Having the network and social time is also needed during this period when we have all been very isolated or only have contact with the people we live with. I personally enjoy when workshops give us a chance to share our work and receive feedback from

other participants. With writing, feedback is so important and helps us to edit and improve our pieces.

This summer I will be entering the BIPOC of Publishing in Canada mentorship program to learn more about the world of editorial. Mentorship programs such as that of BIPOC of Publishing and Diaspora Dialogues, allow mentees to connect with people we may not have been able to access on our own. While it's very possible to meet other folks in the writing and publishing industry through virtual events and social media, taking the chance to "cold call" can be a hit or miss. In the past, these program opportunities haven't always been easy to come by, and traditional routes like MFA's and other programs were necessary for one to develop in the field and establish themselves.

Providing writers with inclusive and financially accessible spaces during the pandemic has continued to make a positive impact on the Canadian writing community, allowing folks to use their free time to develop projects and connect with a community that is invested in their growth and craft. Through virtual methods, organizations have been able to reach new audiences and allow local audiences who may not have had the time or means to attend events in the past an opportunity to participate. With the vitality of these programs undeniable, perhaps organizations will continue to offer virtual events when life resumes, expanding their communities and options to all who can benefit.

Tiara Jade Chutkhan is a writer, editor and researcher born and raised in Toronto. Her love of literature led her to start blogging and sharing her reads, particularly those by BIPOC authors. Tiara's Indo-Caribbean heritage is extremely important to her and her writing is geared toward exploring the Indo-Caribbean diaspora, its history and culture. Tiara's first book, Two Times Removed: An Anthology of Indo-Caribbean Fiction, was released in May 2021.



Worthy of Being Called Whole: On the “Asian Canadian” Literary Landscape

BY ERICA HIROKO ISOMURA

As I write this article, it’s the month of May, and Asian Heritage Month has begun. On the West Coast, the petals of cherry blossom trees have fallen to the ground, their branches blanketed with fresh green growth.

In the middle of the night, I find myself switching on the light and reaching towards the stack of books on my bedside table—at the moment, this includes Michael Prior’s poetry collection *Burning Province* and Grace Eiko Thomson’s memoir, *Chiru Sakura: A Mother & Daughter’s Journey Through Racism, Internment and Oppression*.

I feel deeply moved by both of these works, speaking across generations to the legacies of Japanese Canadian internment. Prior writes from a perspective adjacent to my own, a 30-year-old mixed Yonsei millennial who is descended from internees. Meanwhile, Thomson shares a first-hand account of her childhood in Pauerugai, a pre-war Japanese Canadian neighbourhood in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. It was here on Powell Street where my Japanese great-grandparents first made a home in Canada; here, where my grandfather was birthed into this world. My *jiichan* passed away before I could hear his life stories. In this way, I am

grateful for Asian Canadian storytellers — they are one of the reasons why I write. And it is here, in the presence of their voices, where I first came to believe I might write and publish a book.

* * *

Before I became a writer, I was a reader. I know that’s common for most writers, but it wasn’t until my early-to-mid-twenties when I discovered my literary kin, so to speak. At this time, I realized how few books I’d read that reflected stories written by people who looked like me or who had experienced a hybridized cultural upbringing, were possibly queer, and navigated society in a liminal manner. Between 2014 to 2015, I attempted to access as many works by Asian Canadian that were available to me. I read early and formative writings and books by SKY Lee, Larissa Lai, Wayson Choy, Mona Oikawa, Jen Sookfong Lee, Fred Wah, Hiromi

While representation matters in our literary landscape, there is something mildly unnerving about discussing reading lists and book recommendations at a time when racial injustice manifests as an explicitly violent affair.

Goto, Rita Wong, and Roy Miki, among others. One of the most impactful contemporary books I recall reading at that time was *She of the Mountains* by Vivek Shraya, a re-imagining of Hindu mythology through an exploration of bodies and bisexuality.

While representation matters in our literary landscape, there is something mildly unnerving about discussing reading lists and book recommendations at a time when racial injustice manifests as an explicitly violent affair. The inequitable global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Attacks on Asians across North America. Airstrikes on Palestinians in Gaza. The death toll rises in India. This is the news I wake up to during Asian Heritage Month. This is only a sampling of issues that often extend beyond the limits, and possibilities, of a page. “*Metaphors about death are for poets who think ghosts care about sound,*” writes poet Noor Hindi in “Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying.” As an artist of colour, how can I be expected to address issues of literature and publishing in a silo? The lasting change we need in our world still remains absent.

In the days following the Atlanta spa shootings in March 2021, where six Asian women were fatally killed in a simultaneous racist, misogynistic, and whorephobic crime, novelist Lisa Ko tweeted, “As a writer and reader of books, I am sorry to say that white supremacy is not going to be dismantled through diverse reading lists.” Ko continued, “I love books! Thank you for reading mine! But it honestly pains me to see such power placed onto this individualized/sacrosanct act of ‘reading for empathy’ (if only it was so simple), when a novel can often be...a thing you like to read to pass the time.”

Ko’s tweets resonate with me, though I believe this is a *yes, and...* issue.

At a recent online book launch, author Hiromi Goto addressed the role that protagonists from underrepresented communities (as written by underrepresented writers) can fill for readers who may not have met people from said backgrounds before. This is illustrated in critically acclaimed slice-of-life film *Minari* when 7-year-old David Yi turns to his Korean grandmother with bewilderment. She has recently landed in Arkansas and the two of them have recently met for the first time.

“Grandma, you’re not a real grandma. They bake cookies!” He insists, “They don’t swear! They don’t wear men’s underwear!”

David’s grandmother laughs, then proceeds to teach him how to gamble.

In a similar manner, 76-year-old Kumiko, the protagonist in Goto’s latest graphic novel, *Shadow Life*, offers another alternative to mainstream stereotypes of a docile Asian elder. Kumiko defies her daughter’s wishes, runs away from a senior’s care facility, and chooses to live life on her own terms. While I am well acquainted with stereotypes regarding the “passive nature” of both Asian women and elders, I became fully aware of how far from the truth these portrayals actually were after reading *Shadow Life*. Kumiko’s character is surprisingly familiar to me. Many of us, especially those who have been raised by Asian women, know they are not weak in the slightest. In my family, my dad is most certain that his mother-in-law, my 92-year-old *poh poh* (and our matriarch), will outlive us all. Amidst the surge of violence against Asian elders in our current times, it is encouraging to grasp onto these stories full of life and humour, bearing witness to and recalling one another’s complexities.

* * *

In a recent letter to a pen pal, I wrote that I don’t want to become a “trauma writer.” My pen pal — who happens to be Asian Canadian and an author — wrote back, “*I really feel that!!*,” and it was nice to know I am not alone in these sentiments, in my fears of what is permissible of me to write on the page.

As a reader and writer, I simultaneously want:

- a) to read satisfying stories,
- b) to write and publish a book one day; and
- c) to witness justice in the world; to witness care.

I do not need to read any more negligent (or frankly, lazy) character stereotypes. I do not need to hear any more stories about racism or appropriation in the industry. I do not want to find out that a non-Asian publisher said a manuscript was unpublishable because it was considered too Asian, or not Asian enough. I want to see Asian Canadian writers being featured on literary panels, year-round, not just during Asian Heritage Month or after a series of hate crimes. Can I be so bold to say that I want to see two Asian Canadian writers slated at the same non-Asian Heritage Month reading event? (I may be asking for a lot here — I realize there are a lot of underrepresented groups and Asians are most definitely not

I believe this breadth of writings can offer dialogue and strategies — to be paired with necessary actions — towards envisioning a better world for all of us; shedding skin on outdated ways of being and believing in the world, literary or otherwise.

the only ones.) I want Asian Canadian writers to have the chance to work with Asian Canadian book editors. I want to be able to read books by Asian Canadians that have nothing to do with their pain or inherited trauma. Is any of this too much to ask from the literary universe?

* * *

Stacked among a pile of library books, Mary Ruefle's collected lectures, *Honey, Rack and Madness*, sits on my coffee table. In "Someone Reading a Book is a Sign of Order in the World," Ruefle writes, "I want everything to be okay. That's why I read when I was a lonely kid and that's why I read now that I am a scared adult. [...] Still, I believe the planet on the table, even when wounded and imperfect, fragmented and deprived, is worthy of being called whole. Our minds and the universe — what else is there?"

When it comes down to it, this is what I ultimately want for our Canadian literary landscape, too. Whether nestled with a book in quiet solitude or in all of the industry's star-studded glory, I want our literary universe to be entirely *worthy of being called whole, even when wounded and imperfect, fragmented, and deprived.*

And yet, how do we get there? How do we create the lasting change we want to see? While a diverse reading list may not dismantle white supremacy, Asian Canadian writers have shown me what worlds are possible to step into, the effect of a voice. Merely by existing, Asian Canadian writers are effecting larger change — pushing the needle to reclaim and reframe narratives surrounding mental health, trans liberation, transpacific adoption, global migration, capitalism, media culture, and community care, just to name a few topics of significance.

I believe this breadth of writings can offer dialogue and strategies — to be paired with necessary actions—towards envisioning a better world for all of us; shedding skin on outdated ways of being and believing in the world, literary or otherwise. I can't help but feel hopeful and excited for the future of Asian Canadian voices in literature and publishing. I can't help but look forward to having my book added to someone else's reading stack one day, may it be worthy.

TSUNDOKU

A glimpse at "Asian Canadian" titles on my current reading list, in my unruly pile of unread books or shopping cart, and on hold or requested at my local public library.

Borderlands by Marc Perez (Anstruther Press, 2020)

Love Speech by Xiaoxuan / Sherry Huang (Metatron Press, 2019)

Cyclopedia Exotica by Aminder Dhaliwal (Drawn and Quarterly, 2021)

One and Half of You by Leanne Dunic (Talon Books, 2021)

Our Little Kitchen by Jillian Tamaki (House of Anansi Press, 2020)

Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism by Harsha Walia (Haymarket Books, 2021)

The Subtweet by Vivek Shraya (ECW Press, 2020)

Iron Goddess of Mercy by Larissa Lai (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2021)

Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement, co-edited by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Ejeris Dixon (AK Press, 2020)

Please note: These titles are books I've yet to read (but am looking forward to!), drawn from my personal reading list, and not to be designated a "diverse" reading list for the purposes of ending systemic racism. Thank you to Carolyn Nakagawa for sharing the term "tsundoku" with me.

Erica Hiroko Isomura is a writer who lives on unceded x̱məθkʷəjəm, Skwxwú7mesh, səllilwetə, and qiqéyt territories in New Westminster, BC. Selected by Room Magazine for their 2021 Emerging Writer Award and past winner of Briarpatch Magazine's Writing In The Margins contest for creative non-fiction, her work appears in Canadian literary publications such as Room, carte blanche, Poetry is Dead, and emerge 18 anthology. She is currently working on a collection of essays and poetry.

Dispatches

NOTES ON THE WRITING LIFE

POETRY /

A Hotline to Connection: Vancouver's First Free Poetry Phone

BY RENÉE SAROJINI SAKLIKAR



Dialling into poetry—this past year and a half, replete with unimaginable challenges and heartache, also brought opportunity in unexpected ways.

In October 2020, as a Vancouver poet, self-isolating at home, I was working on a series of essay fragments about how our pandemic reality exacerbated social isolation. In the midst of that work, I was asked to help curate Vancouver's first free poetry hotline. Clare Warner, public spaces and placemaking coordinator for the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA) contacted me. We'd entered each other's professional circles as part of my role in curating Simon Fraser University's Lunch Poems at SFU. Clare pitched an idea that immediately captivated my interest: in her research on social engagement through the arts, she'd heard about a poetry hotline project in Ireland. I loved the idea of just picking up the phone and dialling into poetry!

Clare invited me to consider helping to curate a project whose goal would be uplifting entertainment in an accessible format, in the forms of free poetry recordings played over a "hotline," aimed particularly at those who might be reeling under the stress of social isolation during the pandemic: our focus would be recruiting local poets published by local presses whose work would broadly meet Clare's vision of lighthearted themes that nevertheless engaged with social issues, and that were on the short side, suitable for five minute recordings. Research showed that an audience for this type

of program would include people experiencing physical, social, and mental isolation; those who might be less familiar with newer digital technologies; and who were perhaps less familiar with poetry. As a poet interested in juxtaposition, Clare's project felt right for our pandemic times. I liked the retro idea of a "hotline": the DVBIA was generously funding 1-833-763-6748 and that we'd pay our local poets a modest honorarium.

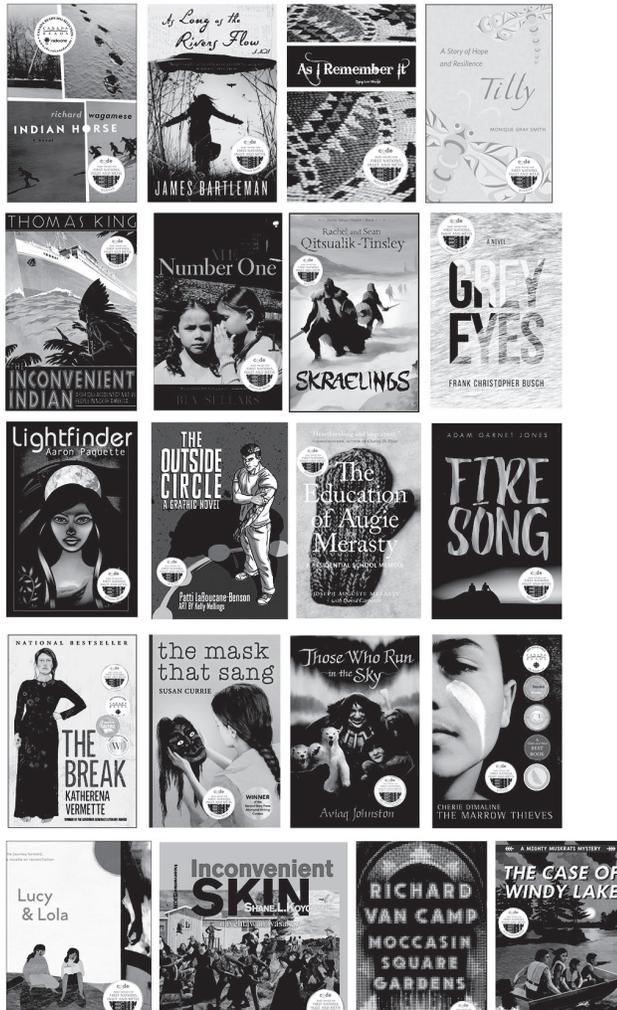
We looked for talented diverse poets whose short works might prove accessible and meaningful. Our budget was limited, and we had room for only ten poets: that was the tough part as there are always so many fabulous poets in Vancouver whose work touches many facets of our shared experience. We asked our ten poets to submit a range of poems and then we curated those into the ten pieces that currently play on our Poetry Phone. Our project launched on February 5, 2021, with poems from myself, and these fine poets and writers: Christine Bissonnette, Fiona Tinwei Lam, Charles Demers, Jennica Harper, Otoniya Juliane Bitek, Jonina Kirton, Joanne Arnott, Rachel Rose, and Dina Del Buchia.

I don't think any of us were prepared for the instant and gratifying response from local, regional and national media: thousands of calls-in. Folks seemed to love the Poetry Phone as much as we did. We soon received requests to include full text of the poems for those who could not dial in but who could, "click to see," and interestingly, several millennial reporters who contacted us commented that they were more comfortable swiping up and down on the website and then clicking on the embedded recordings of the poets' reading their poems rather than doing what many others preferred, including my mother in long-term care, which was

Celebrating 20 Award-Winning Indigenous Authored Books



50,500 books given to Readers and Teachers through CODE's First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Young Adult Literature Program 2013-2020



With the passing of the Award's main benefactor, the Burt Award program has come to a close. We offer our gratitude to William "Bill" Burt (1946 - 2017) for his vision and generosity in support of great Canadian writing.

The award is the result of a close collaboration between CODE and the following organizations:



dialling in "the old-fashioned way." To the credit of the DVBIA, the website is robust: poet photos, biographies, sound recordings, and the text of their poems all are accessible within a few clicks: <https://www.dtvn.ca/what-we-do/placemaking-and-public-spaces/poetryphone/>

We heard from seniors and we heard from folks struggling with mental health issues; we heard from news anchors delighting in a "feel good story;" and we heard from people in the city, needing to connect. What I love about our curated collection is that mixed with the humour are poems that touch on racial injustice and mental health and social isolation: the need to connect, a common theme. And one that resonates in this liminal space between "lasting" as in a printed poem in a book, stable and yearning to be read, and the ephemeral dimension of anything aural/oral: the sound of a poet's voice on the telephone. Since the spring, at the end of long weeks of "too many zoom meetings" and even, recently, unfortunately, screen-time induced migraines, I've found my way back to dialling into these ten short poems just to hear the voices of poets reading their lines. I know most of these writers, haven't seen them, of course, in over a year, and yet revel in the connection. Hopefully, we will be able to secure more funding for continuing this imaginative program. Stay tuned! And I hope TWUC members will dial in: 1-833-POEMS-4-U.

Renée Sarojini Saklikar is a poet and lawyer who lives in Vancouver. She is the author of four books, including children of air india, a poetry book about the bombing of Air India Flight 182 which won the Canadian Authors Association Poetry Prize and is the co-author, with Dr. Mark Winston, of the poetry and essay collection, Listening to the Bees, winner of the 2019 Gold Medal Independent Publishers Book Award, Environment/Ecology. The first book in her epic fantasy series in verse, Bramah and The Beggar Boy, about a female hero battling to save a planet ravaged by climate change, will be published July 2021 by Nightwood Editions.

COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE



The poetry vaccine hotline

Finding Myself

BY ROKSANA BAHRAMITASH



My ticket to Oaxaca, Mexico, was booked for March 31, 2020. The trip was a new start and exploration of a new career as a life coach, exploring the idea of working with a yoga studio owner — a friend of a friend.

Becoming a life coach was my way of sharing what I had learned through a difficult rehabilitation journey I had just travelled painfully. It was just over five years after a brain surgery that saved me from two potentially deadly tumours. After the operation, I was incapable of reading and writing within a week from an international academic publishing one book every couple of years besides various contracts with international organizations. The last one was working as a high-profile UN advisor.

The woman who left that operation room in October 2015 had no resemblance to who I knew as “me.” Over a week, my life changed from an international scholar and policy advisor/advocate to someone who could barely perform daily activities — all I had built through decades of hard work crumbled after those six hours on the operating table.

I stepped into a surreal world in search of “me.”

To find old “me,” I searched and researched and turned myself into a lab and went on a significant venture to find a new “me.” The experiment slowly gained some degree of success, and some new life started to shape. Clearly, my life had to change and change forever. Five years into the journey, I found some firm grounds to walk, and my new mission became helping others to navigate life-shaking traumas.

Just as I thought I had reconfigured my life, Covid-19 and the lockdown happened. And the question of “now what?” came to haunt me.

In the stillness of confinement in a city experiencing the most brutal hit during the first wave in Canada — Montreal — I clearly had to rethink my life. With no one around, no idea about the future, I plunged into the past, and mysteriously, the stillness of the confinement took me to my roots. To the place I was born — Iran. To find tools to survive the hurricane that shook me

down to my core once again, I started to reflect on the history of where I was born. My country of birth, Iran, had survived many apocalyptic moments in its thousands of years its existence.

Picking up my old copy of Hafiz, Molana (Rumi in English), I searched for poems from Rabiah. As I read their poems, Rabiah’s passion, Hafiz’s wisdom, and Molana’s dance broke the stillness, and an inner *sama* started. Sama means listening. It is also a dance, danced for several centuries in Iran, where it was born. A dance inspiring and inspired by Persian poetry. Rumi whispered, “You dance inside me, where no one sees you, but I do.” That inner dance brought the pen back and unleashed my deep longing for being a creative writer.

I wrote a blog for the Quebec Writers’ Federation (QWF.) They published the blog online and later as part of an anthology. Soon after sending the blog, I took a workshop with QWF and wrote my first creative nonfiction piece after the brain tumour, and it received a great deal of praise. The brain tumour surgery had become my teacher, and the lesson was to do what you love in life and embrace who you are. With that, I shed all my inhibitions and ventured into what I have been wanting to do — write a memoir.

The two sudden disastrous and life-changing events in slightly over five years apart have been overwhelming. Yet, together brought an inner sama. Once I listened carefully, there was much to learn from them. My grandmother used to say, “You must always believe in the wisdom of the universe and trust that what happens is for a reason and part of the journey you are meant to travel.” In that spirit, I choose to embrace the changes that fell upon my life violently and dramatically as they have been. And I look at them as part of a circular movement of life force, bringing me to me to my roots and guiding me down unexpected paths and leading me to the stories I have not yet written.

Roksana Bahramitash earned her Ph.D. from McGill University’s Department of Sociology. She is the author of several books and refereed journal articles in English and is the winner of numerous awards, including a creative nonfiction project from the Canada Council. She is currently working on her memoir based on her rehabilitation journey from two deadly brain tumours by dancing and writing.

COMMUNITY /

A Successful Virtual Residence

BY DANNY RAMADAN



Back in January 2020, I thought I would be living in Saskatoon for nine months.

I rented an apartment in Saskatoon for September 2020. A beautiful one bedroom and den on the fourth floor of a homey building, overlooking a quiet street dotted with tall trees. The photos promised a sunny winter, with a comfortable couch, a hot cup of tea, and a warm duvet on my shoulders while I type away beautiful sentences in my upcoming novel. My office at the Saskatoon Public Library (SPL), with its glass door and its proximity to endless bookshelves, promised a refuge from the harsh snow days, while I pour my thoughts into a feedback letter to one of the patrons who access my services as the Writer in Residence. My husband's extended family living in the area promised dinners and wine, and he offered to visit me in December so we could spend Christmas in his grandparents' home in Swift Current. Toon people I've never met added me on Facebook and offered me recommendations for food and poetry nights. I was added to all sorts of local Facebook groups, from the run-of-the-mill queer gathering spaces to a polyamorous meetup group whose members had the best consent practices I've ever witnessed online.

A new novel idea bubbled in my head: a Syrian refugee protagonist relocating to Saskatoon during its coldest days and meeting an eccentric local family — *August Osage County* meets *Coming to America* but with lots of snow. The kind of book you'd find a family tree on its first page, and that lends itself well to both social criticism and romanticized prairie living. I researched locations to visit, planned trips to nearby towns for some historical context, and promised myself to be more extroverted so I could get to know the locals.

Then COVID-19 hit.

(Such a cliché to say this now, don't you agree?)

Fast-forward to today, on my last week of the gig after nine months of being the Saskatoon Public Library's Virtual Writer in Residence, and I couldn't have hoped for a better experience. Over the past months, I've developed friendships with many

local artists, got to know a group of aspiring authors, created video tutorials on how to write your first sentence and how to edit your own manuscript, invited authors from both Vancouver and Saskatoon to read each other's work on Zoom and discuss the connections they find in their own art, and offered a virtual space for up-and-comers to read their work and get paid for it. I visited book clubs, was invited to read my children's book to local schools, and had the pleasure of reading the work of folks ranging from 12-years-old to 89-years-old. All of which was done from my home office right here in Vancouver.

I say this without failing to name the challenges: panicked emails were exchanged with the (calm, accommodating, and lovely) folks at SPL, who put up with my anxieties. I had to watch endless YouTube tutorials on how to edit my own videos to do simple things like insert a photo and add a caption. Sometimes, in the grey days of Vancouver's winter, I wished I was living in sunny, snowy Saskatoon, putting on my finest shirt and glamorous faux-fur jacket and going for a weekly reading at the library, or drinking a beer with a local poet. Sometimes, I wished I could take myself seriously, sitting in my home office in my sweatpants attempting to create a nuanced and genuine experience for those seeking my services, while clicking "Join" on yet another Zoom call.

Honestly, what kept me going and I think contributed to the success of this year's WiR program is the fact that I saw the position as a responsibility: I was an essential service to folks stuck at home, and I treated the job as such. Many of these folks are seeking not only someone to talk to them about writing but someone to just talk to.

The work was a message; a place for folks to feel good about life while the rest of the world is going through an apocalypse. No matter where the work presented to me stood on the scale of professional creative writing, I always tried to find a positive thing or two to say about the work; I offered critique with empathetic view.

I am proud of the work I did as a Writer in Residence at the Library. My proudest moment was, and probably will forever be, the day a young, queer poet told me that they never felt listened to like they did when we were on a Zoom call together. When they said that, the distance did not matter, the restrictions disappeared. We were just two creatives feeling gratitude that in this very moment, both of our arts mattered.

Danny Ramadan is a Syrian-Canadian author and LGBTQ-refugee advocate. His debut novel, The Clothesline Swing, won multiple awards. His children's book, Salma the Syrian Chef, continues to receive accolades. Both books were translated to multiple languages. His short stories and essays appeared in publications across North America and Europe. Ramadan's forthcoming novel, The Foghorn Echoes (2022), and his memoir, Crooked Teeth (2024), will be released by Penguin Random House. Ramadan graduated from UBC with an MFA in Creative Writing and lives in Vancouver with his husband, Matthew Ramadan.

CONNECTION /

Doors Wide Open

BY TRICIA FRIESEN REED



When I go to larger cities, I always find a bookstore. When I walk into the bookstore, I look for the bulletin boards, often near the entrance, advertising upcoming events.

When I stand before the collage of posters, with tantalizing details on author readings, workshops, or concerts, I scan the dates. *Could any of this be happening right now?* I wonder. *Within the next hour or so?* And when I hit it just right, when there is a poet launching a new collection or an author reading, I feel as lucky as a lottery winner.

I live in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, a two-hour drive from Regina and a flight away from Canada's larger cities. There are many things I love about my home (the ten-minute bike-ride across town, for example, or seeing familiar faces at almost any event), but I crave opportunities to interact with other writers and authors. To this end, I have pretended to be a Winnipegger so I could consult with a Writer in Residence at the city's Millennium Library, driven through a snowstorm to participate in a storytelling workshop with Métis artist Leah Dorian, and taken my children out of school so I could travel all day for a brief meeting with author Katherine Lawrence. I have undertaken these trips, among many others, to connect with a literary world that often seems just beyond my reach.

The first time I went to Talking Fresh, an annual writing festival in Regina, I spent most of the day looking at the other

participants, simply soaking in the fact that I was in a room full of people who delighted in their craft. The best part of the conference wasn't necessarily what I learned from the presentations, although they were well done; the best part was realizing that there were people from all corners of my province who were as passionate about writing as I was. As time passed, I appreciated this community more and more but only participated in events once or twice each year, since every consultation, workshop, or festival, required me to travel.

Until the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the midst of a lock-down and stay-at-home orders, freedom sang its way to me through Zoom invites and online meetings. Suddenly, the doors to the literary community blew wide open. The Saskatchewan Writers' Guild launched a virtual writer-in-residence program and I immediately signed up for as many sessions as I could. Poetry, memoir, and publishing workshops, hosted by organizations from all over the country, began filling my calendar. The kinds of things I'd always seen advertised on bulletin boards were now a real possibility for me, and I was hungry. I kept bellying-up to the buffet for more.

There are many things that have changed for all of us recently, and even the less tragic outcomes are still difficult. I can't wait for a time when I won't find disposable masks caught in shrubs or clogging the gutter; when my daughter won't shrink away from a hug from her grandmother; and when I can be with a group of people without the stutter of internet delays. But I do hope my accessibility to the wider writing community is a change that lasts.

Last winter I attended a virtual storytelling workshop that opened with an assignment. We were asked to stand outside on our porches or balconies for a minute to ground ourselves using our five senses. It was dark and I could see stars between the telephone and internet lines that ran to our house. I smelled a whiff of natural gas when our furnace kicked in, and felt the teeth of minus 27°C sink into my skin. The next moment I went back inside, kicking off the huge Baffin boots I had pulled over my pajama pants, and settled in front of my computer. As participants introduced themselves, I gasped when a woman mentioned that she, too, was from Yorkton. I messaged her immediately in the meeting chat room, and we traded contact information. Unfortunately, I've misplaced my note and can't seem to find her details. This is a pity, but perhaps we'll meet again face-to-face, and if not, maybe in a virtual meeting hosted in some far-flung city like Montreal or Vancouver, both of us wearing pajama pants, of course.

Tricia Friesen Reed is a writer and educator with international experience in teaching and community development. Her writing has appeared in The Midwest Review, Geez Magazine, and Deep Wild among other publications. Tricia lives in Yorkton, Saskatchewan with family where she grows food, keeps bees, and blogs at experimentingaswegrow.wordpress.com.

News

THE LATEST ON WRITING AND PUBLISHING
IN CANADA AND BEYOND

PUBLISHING AND BOOKSELLING

2020 Sees Anticipated Sales Decline

BookNet Canada's annual sales study, *The Canadian Book Market* (released in late March 2021), showed an expected drop in overall book sales for 2020, not surprising considering the uncertainty around brick-and-mortar stores being shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to BookNet, the worst sales numbers of 2020 were for the early lockdown week of April 5, a 37 percent drop from March 15. There was a brief summer rebound as online sales, curbside pickup, and home delivery took over the space. In fact, 2020 sales outpaced 2019 between July and September. Sadly, holiday sales flattened, bringing 2020 to a close with a 4 percent drop in book sales year-to-year. Not good, but not as terrible as it looked like it was going to be in the spring.

HarperCollins Acquires HMH, Advancing Industry Concentration

As reported in *Quill & Quire* in May, News Corp, the parent company of HarperCollins, has completed a purchase of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books & Media (HMH) for just under US\$350 million. HMH titles are distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books, and there has been no announcement of any change to that relationship. Canadian industry groups are still waiting for a federal government response to another announced sale, that of Simon and Schuster to Bertelsmann, the parent company of Penguin Random House, for US\$2.2 billion. Both publishers maintain prominent Canadian operations.

BIPOC of Publishing Provides Mentorship

The Canadian not-for-profit collective BIPOC of Publishing was formed in

2019 for Black, Indigenous, and people of colour currently working in the Canadian book publishing industry. BIPOC of Publishing has so far programmed two mentoring sessions for BIPOC individuals working in publishing, agenting, and other related occupations. The 2020 session saw eleven mentor/mentee pairings. The 2021 sessions were announced in June. Follow BIPOC of Publishing on Twitter @BIPOCPub or at the website bipocofpublishing.ca. TWUC is thrilled to see other mentoring opportunities for emerging BIPOC writers after the success of its own BIPOC Writers Connect series.

Wattpad to Publish Adult Fiction

The online writing and reading space Wattpad (recently bought from Canadian startup owners by online search company Naver, of South Korea) has announced plans for an adult fiction publishing line. Five books will be published in the first year of operation, and titles will be drawn from the work that is freely shared on Wattpad's e-reading site and rated for popularity by the reading audience. Wattpad has previously found market success in the traditional print space with its Young Adult Fiction line.

INTERNATIONAL

Used Book Royalty Scheme Launched in the UK

Two large used book sellers in the United Kingdom, Bookbarn International and World of Books Group, have launched a fund to provide authors with a limited royalty on the sale of used copies of their books. Both the Society of Authors (SoA) and the Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) have announced their support for AuthorSHARE, the new £200,000 fund. Participating booksellers will share their sales data with the fund,

and a cap-limited royalty will be paid, similar to PLR payments. Sales of used books in the UK is expected to be a half-a-billion-pound business by 2025.

FUNDING

Public Arts Funders Call for Basic Income Guarantee

In late March, the CEOs of Canada's five largest municipal arts councils (Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, and Edmonton) published an op-ed in *The Globe and Mail* calling on the federal government to establish a Basic Income Guarantee for Canadian artists. Noting the historical precarity of arts work, the generous response of Canada's artists to pandemic restrictions, and successful income supplement models of CERB and CRB programs, the article makes a case for an innovative change to how we fund the arts. The Writers' Union of Canada has included basic income proposals in its advocacy for many years, and the last year has seen increased interest in the idea.

PRIZES AND AWARDS

Donald Windham-Sandy M. Campbell Literature Prizes to Two Canadians

Poet Canisia Lubrin and author Dionne Brand were both awarded prizes through Yale University's Windham-Campbell Prize program. Endowed by longtime partners Donald Windham and Sandy M. Campbell, the program awards US\$165,000 as an unrestricted grant to each of eight recipients yearly. Nominations and shortlists for the Windham-Campbell Prizes remain secret, and only the awarded authors are publicly announced.

THANK YOU

The Writers' Union of Canada thanks the following individuals for their generous donations

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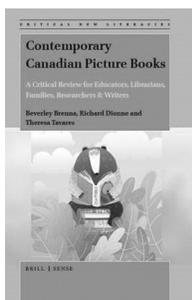
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Member News & Awards

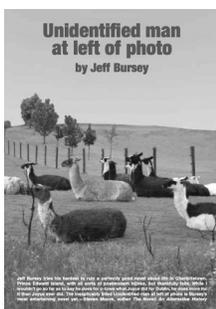
Announcements

Lillian Bouzane published her second ebook on Amazon on March 20, 2021: *Newfoundland Stories from Handy Harbour Island*.

Saskatoon writer **Beverley Brenna**, with co-authors Richard Dionne and Theresa Tavares, has just published *Contemporary Canadian Picture Books: A Critical Review for Educators, Librarians, Families, Researchers & Writers* (Brill/Sense, 2021). The book uses thematic chapters to spotlight over 200 titles, and the final chapter contains original interviews with a dozen new rising stars in writing and book illustration. Offered in hardcover and paperback as well as Open Access, the authors “want readers to be aware of what a rich and diverse body of content we have in Canada...to see these books in classrooms, libraries, and homes...to find Canadian titles on recommended reading lists...and to encourage these books into the hands of young people.” A Canadian SSHRC Insight grant supported the research underpinning this publication. For more information, please see brill.com/view/title/60329.



Jeff Bursey's latest novel, *Unidentified man at left of photo* (published by corona\ samizdat, an imprint of Amalietti & Amalietti), is an exploratory satire (complete with photographs) set in Charlottetown, PEI. Apart from having fun with Island customs, it also speaks to aesthetic concerns in Canadian literature. His short story collection, *an impalpable certain rest*, is just out from the same press. They can be ordered by writing the publisher, Rick Harsch, at rick.harsch@gmail.com.



Wingmaker (Kids Can Press) is about an old caterpillar and her ant friends and is Hamilton author **Dave Cameron's** first book for kids. From *Kirkus Reviews*: “A good-hearted picture book with an unusual, fictional take on metamorphosis.” *Wingmaker* is illustrated by David Huyck.

Devon Code is pleased to announce the publication of *Disintegration in Four Parts* (Coach House Books). *Disintegration in Four Parts* is a work of literary fiction providing four different perspectives on the problematic notion of purity. Jean Marc Ah-Sen writes about love blooming between two writers belonging to feuding literary movements; Emily Anglin explores an architect's

search for her twin at a rural historic house; Devon Code documents the Wittgensteinian upheavals of the last days of an elderly woman; and Lee Henderson imagines Dada artist Kurt Schwitters finding unlikely inspiration in a Second World War internment camp in northern Norway. Learn more about this unique collaborative work at devoncode.ca.

Mo Duffy Cobb and co-author Lori Mayne are pleased to announce the publication of *The Chemistry of Innovation: Regis Duffy and the Story of DCL* (Island Studies Press 2021). This company biography chronicles how a farm boy from Prince Edward Island became a successful biotech leader, providing a model for entrepreneurship and economic growth in Canada's smallest province. The key to his success? As Regis once said, “Innovate or die; the alternative is not that appealing.”

Judith: Women Making Visual Poetry, a 21st Century Anthology edited by **Amanda Earl** is now available from Timglaset Editions of Sweden. *Judith* celebrates women making visual poetry today, pays homage to those of the past, and inspires those of the future. The anthology is a 252-page full-colour book featuring the work of thirty-six women from twenty-one countries. More information is available at Timglaset.com.

Patti Edgar's middle-grade novel, *Anna, Analyst* (Yellow Dog/ Great Plains), was published in May 2021. The novel follows eleven-year-old Anna's obsession with handwriting analysis after her best friend announces plans to spend the summer with a more fashionable classmate. *Kirkus Reviews* calls it a “droll, deftly executed debut.” Patti teaches at Mount Royal University and the Alexandra Writers Centre. She has an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. Please visit pattiedgar.ca for more information, including a free study guide for educators and homeschoolers.

Excess Baggage, book 3 in **Jay Forman's** mystery series, was published in April. Travel writer Lee Smith joins her husband, Jack, and his top executives for a corporate team-building adventure, chasing geocaching clues from the Bay of Fundy to the islands of Saint Pierre and Miquelon and across Newfoundland. Lee hopes to escape the intense media interest in her father's appeal of his six murder convictions. Instead, she finds bodies whose first names match her father's victims. More than the media focusses on Lee. The RCMP, French *Gendarmerie Nationale*, and Royal Newfoundland Constabulary are watching everyone on the retreat — especially Lee.

Ken Haigh's new book, *On Foot to Canterbury*, will be published by the University of Alberta Press in August 2021. Setting off on foot from Winchester, Ken hikes across southern England, retracing one of the traditional routes that medieval pilgrims

followed to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. On his journey, he sorts through his own spiritual aimlessness while crossing paths with writers like Anthony Trollope, John Keats, Jane Austen, William Cobbett, Charles Dickens, and, of course, Geoffrey Chaucer. For more details, please visit kenhaigh.ca.

Last year, The Ontario Poetry Society advertised its “Spring Peepers” contest, a cute name that for **Susan Ioannou** inspired images of first crocuses tipping up through the soil. With few poems on hand relating to flowers or other signs of the earth reawakening, the alternative was to enter the poem “Frog Love,” celebrating the mating serenade. Only months later came the discovery that spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) are actually a kind of chorus frog. The poem won first prize.

Writers will appreciate narrative techniques used by **JJ Martin** in *Father Sweet*, his “arresting first novel” (*Booklist*) from Dundurn Press. A settler, Martin worked closely with Anishinaabe cultural consultants and editors to include Indigenous characters respectfully in this story about religious child abuse and reconciliation. Leveraging personal histories and accounts from the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, the story is fictionalized but well-researched tale of Catholicism. In 2020 *Father Sweet* won the Gold Medal, General Fiction for “Living Now” Awards. Aside from a story “told with admirable grace” (*Kirkus*), writers might find thought-provoking approaches to address challenging topics with fiction.



Susan McCaslin's most recent volume of poetry, *Heart Work* (Ekstasis Editions), was released in December of 2020 and launched in February of 2021. Barbara Colebrook Peace writes, “Hildegard of Bingen, John Keats, and Julian of Norwich enter Susan McCaslin’s reflections to enrich our sense of these times and their meaning. McCaslin has evidently lived with the mystics’ writings for a long time, and they appear here, not as though they are of the past, but as though they are presences who have been with us all along. One feels that each of the three visionaries would have treasured this exquisite book, would have welcomed McCaslin into their companionship, and joined with the reader in heartfelt grief and praise as the poet honours our planet in all its beauty, tragedy, and hope.”

Toronto writer **Dirk McLean's** fourth YA novel, *Lone Runner*, was published by James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers on February 16. He is the author of three previous YA novels and three children’s picture books.

George Melnyk is the co-editor of *Finding Refuge in Canada: Narratives of Dislocation* (Athabasca University Press 2021). The book includes first-person accounts of refugees who have come to Canada and also by those who have helped them get to Canada and become settled in their new country. The stories deal with various waves of refugees beginning with the South Asians from Uganda and Chileans in the 1970s to the Tamils and Syrians in the past decade. The world is awash with refugees and Canada has a track record as a welcoming country. It is the only country in the world that has had for many years a private refugee sponsorship program, whose origins are described in the book. As well, the co-editors have written an introduction raising issues about the refugee determination process and ways in which it may be improved. The book is available in print, ebook, and PDF formats from the publisher: aupress.ca/books/120296-finding-refuge-in-canada.

Ken Rivard's eleventh book, a substantial collection of flash fiction entitled *CANALWATCH*, will be published by Mosaic Press in Spring 2022. Each story focusses on characters/ events around a mysterious canal. Readers are invited to sit in a particular *CANALWATCH* moment and take in the “what ifs” and the “not-so-what-ifs.”

Bren Simmers is pleased to announce the publication of her third book of poetry, *If, When* (Gaspereau Press, 2021). These poems link the author’s contemporary experiences living in Squamish, BC, with those of her great-grandparents, who lived in the nearby mining town of Britannia a century earlier. *If, When* offers a fresh and empathetic take on the inevitable tensions between land stewardship and economic development, finding, ultimately, much potential for connection and community.

Nellie P. Strowbridge's latest novel, *The Hanged Woman's Daughter* (Flanker Press), is the long-awaited sequel to *Catherine Snow*, a sold-out novel. Based on a true story, *Catherine Snow* was partly instrumental in having Catherine Snow, the last woman hanged in Newfoundland, declared not guilty in a mock trial held March 29, 2012, by the Newfoundland Historical Society. Strowbridge is the author of thirteen books.

Beryl Young's new picture book, *Show Us Where You Live*, Humpback was released on May 24, 2021, with Greystone Kids. This lyrical book for children 3-7 years celebrates a child’s connection with humpback whales. In a call-and-response format, a mother shares the wonder of the whales with her child, and the child shows how he can swim, sing, and blow bubbles just like the whales. With beautiful illustrations by Sakika Kikuchi, readers are left dreaming of the special world we share with whales. See starred reviews in berlyoung.com.

Awards

Beverly Brenna's *Sapphire the Great and the Meaning of Life* (Pajama Press) was awarded the Joan Betty Stuchner — Oy Vey! — Funniest Children's Book Award in the chapter book category. **Gordon Korman's** *The Unteachables* (Scholastic) and **Tanya Lloyd Kyi's** *Mya's Strategy to Save the World* (Penguin Random House) were shortlisted in the same category. In the picture or board book category, the short list included **Susin Nielsen's** *Princess Puffybottom and Darryl* (Penguin Random House) and **Nicola Winstanley's** *How to Give Your Cat a Bath in Five Easy Steps* (Penguin Random House).

The Dyzgraphxst by **Canisia Lubrin** (McClelland & Stewart) has been shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize.

The League of Canadian Poets' Poetry Awards recognized a number of members this year. **Bertrand Bickersteth** won the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award for *The Response of Weeds* (NeWest Press); **Ian Williams** won the Raymond Souster Award for *Word Problems* (Coach House Books); **Sadiqa de Meijer's** *The Outer Wards* (Véhicule Press/Signal Poetry) was shortlisted for the award; and the long list included **Phill Hall's** *Niagara & Government* (Pedlar Press), **Canisia Lubrin's** *The Dyzgraphxst* (McClelland & Stewart), **Tyler Pennock's** *Bones* (Brick Books), **Meredith Quartermain's** *Lullabies in the Real World* (NeWest Press), and **Lisa Richter's** *Nautilus and Bone* (Frontenac House). The long list for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award included **Afua Cooper's** *Black Matters* (Roseway Publishing), **Sadiqa de Meijer's** *The Outer Wards* (Véhicule Press/Signal Poetry), **Jennifer Hosein's** *A Map of Rain Days* (Guernica Editions), and **Canisia Lubrin's** *The Dyzgraphxst* (McClelland & Stewart).

Members are also well represented on the BC and Yukon Book Prizes short lists. The Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize short list includes **Michelle Good's** *Five Little Indians* (HarperCollins), **Shaena Lambert's** *Petra* (Random House Canada), and **Susan Sanford Blades' Fake It So Real (Nightwood Editions). The Hubert Evans Nonfiction Prize short list includes **Eva Holland's** *Nerve: A Personal Journey Through the Science of Fear* (Allen Lane Canada). The Rodney Haig-Brown Regional Prize short list includes **Claudia Cornwall's** *British Columbia in Flames* (Harbour Publishing) and **Briony Penn's** *Following the Good River: The Life and Times of Wa'xaid* (Rocky Mountain Books, with Cecil Paul). The Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize short list includes **Fred Wah's** *Music at the Heart of Thinking: Improvisations 1-170* (Talonbooks). The Jim Deva Prize for Writing that Provokes short list includes **Michelle Good's** *Five Little Indians* (HarperCollins). The Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize includes **Danny Ramadan's** *Salma the Syrian Chef* (Annick Press) and **Bonnie Sherr Klein's** *Beep Beep Bubbie* (Tradewind Books). The Sheila A. Egoff Children's Literature Prize short list includes **Gail Anderson Dargatz's** *The Ride Home* (Orca Book Publishers), **Dan Bar-el's** *Just Beyond the Very, Very Far North* (Atheneum Books for Young Readers), and **Tanya Lloyd Kyi's** *Me and Banksy* (Puffin Books). The Bill Duthie Bookseller's Choice Award short list includes **Charles Demers' Primary Obsessions** (Douglas & McIntyre) and **Eve Lazarus' Vancouver Exposed: Searching for the City's Hidden History** (Arsenal Pulp Press).**

The ReLit Awards have been revived after four years, announcing finalists and winners for their 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 awards. The 2018 short fiction finalists included the following books by members: *Annie Muktuk and Other Stories* by **Norma Dunning** (University of Alberta Press), *A Mariner's Guide to Self Sabotage* by **Bill Gaston** (Douglas & McIntyre), *Peninsula Sinking* by **David Huebert** (Biblioasis), *You Are Not Needed Now* by **Annette Lapointe** (Anvil), and *Normalwhat'snormal* by **Stan Rogal** (Insomniac). The 2018 poetry finalists included *A Place Called No Homeland* by **Kai Cheng Thom** (Arsenal Pulp) and *Excitement Tax* by **John Emil Vincent** (DC Books). In the 2018 novel category, *Tarry This Night* by **Kristyn Dunnion** (Arsenal Pulp Press) was a finalist.

The 2019 poetry finalists included the following books by members: *Anatomic* by **Adam Dickinson** (Coach House), *City Poems* by **Joe Fiorito** (Exile Editions), *Divided* by **Linda Frank** (Wolsak and Wynn), *Quarrels* by **Eve Joseph** (Anvil Press), and *Full Circle* by **Helen Fogwill Porter** (Breakwater). The winner of the 2019 short fiction award was *All the Lonely People* by **Barry Callaghan** (Exile Editions), and finalists also included *The Knockoff Eclipse* by **Melissa Bull** (Anvil Press) and *Tread & Other Stories* by **Barry Dempster** (Tightrope Books). In the 2019 novel category, the finalists included *No Good Asking* by **Fran Kimmel** (ECW), *Black Star* by **Maureen Medved** (Anvil Press), and *The Deserters* by **Pamela Mulloy** (Esplanade Books).

For the 2020 poetry award, finalists included the following books by members: *The National Gallery* by **Jonathan Ball** (Coach House), *Renaissance Normcore* by **Adele Barclay** (Nightwood Editions), *NDN Coping Mechanisms* by **Billy-Ray Belcourt** (Anansi), *Bounce House* by **Jennica Harper** (Anvil Press), and *Motel Of The Opposable Thumbs* by **Stuart Ross** (Anvil Press). In the 2020 short fiction category, finalists included the following books by members: *Moccasin Square Gardens* by **Richard Van Camp** (Douglas and McIntyre), *A Dark House And Other Stories* by **Ian Colford** (Vagrant Press), *Dig* by **Terry Doyle** (Breakwater), *Cracker Jacks For Misfits* by **Christine Ottoni** (Exile Editions), and *Meteorites* by **Julie Paul** (Touchwood Editions). The 2020 novel finalists included *Proof I Was Here* by **Becky Blake** (Wolsack and Wynn), *This Is Agatha Falling* by **Heather Nolan** (Pedlar Press), *Provisionally Yours* by **Antanas Sileika** (Biblioasis), and *Crow* by **Amy Spurway** (Goose Lane).

And bringing us up to the current year, the 2021 poetry finalists included *The Headless Man* by **Peter Dubé** (Anvil Press), *Niagara & Government* by **Phil Hall** (Pedlar Press), and *Word Problems* by **Ian Williams** (Coach House). *Stoop City* by **Kristyn Dunnion** (Biblioasis) won the 2021 Short Fiction Award, and finalists in that category also included *Here The Dark* by **David Bergen** (Biblioasis), *Seeking Shade* by **Frances Boyle** (Porcupine's Quill), *The Swan Suit* by **Katherine Fawcett** (Douglas & McIntyre), *The End Of Me* by **John Gould** (Freehand), *Swimmers in Winter* by **Faye Guenther** (Invisible), *Permanent Tourist* by **Genni Gunn** (Signature Editions), *Czech Techno* by **Mark Anthony Jarman** (Anvil Press), and *Paradise Island and Other Galaxies* by **Micheal Mirolla** (Exile Editions). In the 2020 novel category, *Fake It So Real* by **Susan Sandord Blades** (Nightwood Editions) was named the winner, and finalists included *Always Brave, Sometimes Kind* by **Katie Bickell** (Brindle & Glass) and *Seeing Martin* by **Su Croll** (Pedlar Press).

Guglielmo D'Izzia's debut novel *The Transaction* (Guernica Editions) is a Foreword INDIES Finalist. *The Transaction* is also a 2021 IPPY Awards Silver Medalist in the Europe – Best Regional Fiction category.

Members' books longlisted for the Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour include *Kinmount* by **Rod Carley** (Latitude 46 Publishing), *Last Impressions* by **Joseph Kertes** (Penguin Random House), *Bar Mitzvah Boy* by **Mark Leiren-Young** (Playwrights Canada Press), and *The Union of Smokers* by **Paddy Scott** (Invisible Publishing).

Two members were named Writers' Trust Rising Stars: **Djamila Ibrahim** and **Keriann McGoogan**.

The Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction was presented to **Michelle Good** for *Five Little Indians* (HarperCollins Canada). The Award for Young People's Literature – Text was presented to **Eric Walters** for *The King of Jam Sandwiches* (Orca Book Publishers); **Colleen Nelson** was a finalist in the same category for *Harvey Holds His Own* (Pajama Press). **Canisia Lubrin's** *The Dyzgraphxst* (McClelland & Stewart) was a finalist for the Award for Poetry. Finalists for the Awards for Nonfiction included **Billy-Ray Belcourt's** *A History of My Brief Body* (Penguin Random House) and **Ivan Coyote's** *Rebent Sinner* (Arsenal Pulp Press). **Jillian Tamaki** was a finalist for the Award for Young People's Literature – Illustrated for *Our Little Kitchen* (Groundwood Books/House of Anansi Press).

The Island Literary Awards recognized member **Mo Duffy Cobb** for the Distinguished Contribution to the Literary Arts of PEI Award.

Czech Techno by **Mark Anthony Jarman** (Anvil Press) was shortlisted in the fiction category for the New Brunswick Book Awards.

At the Atlantic Book Awards, **Afua Cooper's** *Black Matters* (Roseway Publishing) was awarded the J.M. Abraham Poetry Award; late member **Silver Donald Cameron's** *Blood on the Water: A True Story of Revenge in the Maritimes* (Viking Canada/PRHC) was awarded the Robbie Robertson Dartmouth Book Award; and **Anne Simpson's** *Speechless* (Freehand Books) was awarded the Thomas Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award.

Finalists for the Trillium Book Award for Fiction included the following books by members: **Farzana Doctor's** *Seven* (Dundurn Press), **A.F. Moritz's** *As Far As You Know* (House of Anansi Press), **Souvankham Thammavongsa's** *How To Pronounce Knife* (McClelland & Stewart) – winner, and **Emma Donoghue's** *The Pull of the Stars* (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.). For the Award for Poetry, **Canisia Lubrin's** *The Dyzgraphxst* (McClelland & Stewart) was a finalist.

Michael DeForge has been shortlisted for the Doug Wright Award for *Familiar Face* (Drawn & Quarterly).

At the Manitoba Book Awards, **Gaylene Dutchyshen's** *A Strange Kind of Comfort* (Dundurn Press) was a finalist for the Eileen

McTavish Sykes Award for Best First Book; **Jonathan Ball's** *The Lightning of Possible Storms* (Book*hug Press) was awarded the Margaret Laurence Award for Fiction, for which **David Bergen's** *Here the Dark* (Biblioasis) was also a finalist; and **Colleen Nelson's** *Harvey Comes Home* (Pajama Press) was awarded the McNally Robinson Book for Young People, for which **Anita Daher's** *You Don't Have to Die in the End* (Yellow Dog, an imprint of Great Plains Publications) was also a finalist.

Michelle Good received the Amazon.ca First Novel Award for *Five Little Indians* (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.). **Marlowe Granados** was a finalist for the award for *Happy Hour* (Flying Books).

A number of books by members were named winners and honour books at the Forest of Reading Awards. For the Silver Birch Express Award, *Terry Fox and Me* by **Mary Beth Leatherdale** (Tundra Books) was named an honour book. For the Yellow Cedar Award, *Trending: How and Why Stuff Gets Popular* by **Kira Vermond** (Owlkids Books Inc.) was named winner, and *The Boreal Forest: A Year in The World's Largest Land Biome* by **L. E. Carmichael** (Kids Can Press) was named an honour book. *Hunted by the Sky* by **Tanaz Bhathena** (Penguin Random House Canada Young Readers) won the White Pine Award. *Sergeant Billy: La vraie histoire du chevreau devenu soldat* by **Mireille Messier** (Éditions de l'Isatis) won the Prix Méléze.

The Willow Awards/Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards recognized the following members: **Mireille Messier** for *Sergeant Billy: The True Story of the Goat Who Went to War* (Penguin Random House) in the Shining Willow category; **Colleen Nelson** for *Harvey Comes Home* (Pajama Press) in the Diamond Willow category; and **Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch** for *Don't Tell the Nazis* (Scholastic Canada) in the Snow Willow category.

"Winter 8000" by **Bernadette McDonald** received the Premio ITAS Award for Mountain Literature.

Members nominated in the Whistler Independent Book Awards nonfiction category include **Beth Kaplan** for *Loose Woman: My Odyssey from Lost to Found*, **Angie Littlefield** for *Tom Thomson's Fine Kettle of Friends*, and **Tommy Schnurmacher** for *Makeup Tips from Auschwitz: How Vanity Saved My Mother's Life*.

Members with winning books at the Crime Writers of Canada Awards of Excellence in Crime Writing include **Guglielmo D'Izzia** for *The Transaction* (Guernica Editions) for Best Crime Novel, **Katrina Onstad** for *Stay Where I Can See You* (HarperCollins Canada) for the Howard Engel Award for Best Crime Novel Set in Canada, and **Frances Greenslade** for *Red Fox Road* (Puffin Canada) for Best Juvenile or YA Crime Book (Fiction and Nonfiction).

Susan McCaslin's poem "Retiring Into the Greater Work" won Judge's Choice in the Dr. William Henry Drummond Poetry Contest in Cobalt, Ontario, in June 2021.

Betty Keller was presented with the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award for an outstanding literary career in BC. (The Spring 2021 issue of *Write* erroneously stated that Betty was named the recipient of the BC Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence this year; Betty received that award in 2015.)

New Members

Christopher Andreae, *An Atlas of Railway and Waterway History in Canada*, Boston Mills Press, 1997

Myriad Augustine, *Ace of Hearts*, James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 2020

Nadine Bachan, *Ol' Talk*, Tighrope Books, 2015

Jacob Bachinger, *Earth-cool, and Dirty*, Radiant Press, 2021

Roksana Bahramitash, *Veiled Employment*, Syracuse University Press, 2011

Jen Lynn Bailey, *This Is the Boat that Ben Built*, Pajama Press, 2022 (forthcoming)

Barbara Baker, *Summer of Lies*, BWL Publishing, 2021

Sean Bedell, *Somewhere There's Music*, Now or Never Publishing, 2022

Billy-Ray Belcourt, *A History of My Brief Body*, Penguin Random House Canada, 2020

Rob Benvie, *Maintenance*, Coach House Books, 2012

Bertrand Bickersteth, *Response of Weeds: A Misplacement of Black Poetry on the Prairies*, NeWest Press, 2020

Shane Book, *Congotronic*, House of Anansi Press, 2014

Sandra Bradley, *Henry Holton Takes the Ice*, Penguin Young Readers Group USA, 2015

Nic Brewer, *Suture*, Book*Hug, 2021

Sandra Bunting, *Everything in This House Breaks*, Gaelóg Press, 2018

Mark Bylok, *The Whisky Cabinet*, Whitecap Books Ltd., 2014

Jake Byrne, *The Tide*, Rahila Ghost Press, 2017

Brad Casey, *The Handsome Man*, Book*hug, 2020

Mandy Len Catron, *How to Fall in Love with Anyone*, Simon & Schuster, 2017

Emily Chabot, *The Shade of Gold*, Amazon, 2020

Nancy Chislett, *Bombing the Moon*, Now or Never Publishing, 2022 (forthcoming)

Shane Christensen, *Kicking The Darkness: A Memoir*, Word Alive Press, 2019

Stephanie Cooke, *Oh My Gods!*, HMH Kids, 2021

ali macgee, "A Heritage Lift Finds Its Former Glory," *Elevator World*, 2019

Domenic Cusmano, *Call Girl*, University of Lisbon, 2018

jimy dawn, *Sun and the Son*, Night Forest Press, 2020

Sara de Waard, *White Lies*, Cormorant Books, 2022 (forthcoming)

Marcelo Donato, *El telón de Picasso*, Argus-a, 2020

Vincent Durant, *War Horse of Cumberland: The Life and Times of Sir Charles Tupper*, Lancelot Press Limited, 1985

Gaylene Marie Dutchyshen, *A Strange Kind of Comfort*, Dundurn Press, 2020

Amanda Earl, *Kiki*, Invisible Publishing, 2014

Gabrielle Earnshaw, *Henri Nouwen and the Return of the Prodigal Son: The Making of a Spiritual Classic*, Paraclete Press, 2020

Silvia Falsaperla, "The Elderly Lady on the Bus," *Accenti Magazine*, 2020

Sanita Fejzic, *Psychomachia*, Quattro Books, 2016

Perdita Felicien, *My Mother's Daughter*, Doubleday, 2021

Colleen Fisher Tully, "Can Denser be Better?," *The Walrus*, 2020

Jeremy Fox, *The Chocolate Man*, Cormorant Books, 1995

Marco Fraticelli, *Drifting*, Catkin Press, 2013

S.M. Freedman, *The Faithful*, Thomas and Mercer, 2015

Kathy Friedman, *All the Shining People*, House of Anansi, 2022 (forthcoming)

Sierra Skye Gemma, "How to Lose One Billion Dollars," *wards*, 2019

Leslie Gentile, *Elvis, Me and The Lemonade Stand Summer*, Cormorant Books, 2021

Hollay Ghadery, *Fuse*, Guernica Editions, 2021

Daniel Goodwin, *The Art of Being Lewis*, Cormorant Books, 2019

Bob Gordon, *Life After COVID-19: Lessons from Past Pandemics*, Banovallum Books / Mortons Books Ltd., 2020

Catherine Gourcier, *Breathe Cry Breathe*, HarperCollins, 2021

Marlowe Granados, *Happy Hour*, Flying Books, 2020

Faye Guenther, *Swimmers In Winter*, Invisible Publishing, 2020

Kim Mooney, *Hidden Daughter-Secret Sister: A Story of Adoption*, Austin Macauley, 2020

Sharon Plumb, *Draco's Child*, Thistledown Press, 2010

Carla Harris, *Obtain No Proof*, Frog Hollow Press, 2020

Mimi Batho, *Avocat*, Gramedia Indonesia, 2019

Elaine Hayes, *White Margarine: A Novel*, Inanna Publications, 2021

Jason Heit, *Kaidenberg's Best Sons*, Guernica Editions, 2020

Matthew Heiti, *The City Still Breathing*, Coach House Books, 2013

Patricia Henman, *Beyond the Legal Limit*, Caitlin Press, 2021

CE Hoffman, *Sluts and Whores*, Thurston Howl Publications, 2021

Jennifer Hosein, *A Map of Rain Days*, Guernica Editions, 2020

Yolande House, *Ageless, Re: Myth: Stories and Poems by the Blacktop Motorcycle Gang*, Broken Jaw Press, 2010

Meg Howald, *Are But Shadows*, Solstice Publishing, 2013

Naseem Hrab, *Weekend Dad*, Anansi/ Groundwood Books, 2020

Phyllis L. Humby, *Old Broad Road*, Crossfield Publishing, 2020

Dallas Hunt, *Awâsis and the World-Famous Bannock*, Portage and Main / HighWater Press, 2018

Caitlin Thomson, *Incident Reports*, Hyacinth Girl Press, 2014

Heather Jessup, *The Lightning Field*, Gaspereau Press, 2011

Sandra Kasturi, *Come Late to the Love of Birds*, Tighrope Books, 2015

Joelle Kidd, "Erasure," *Feels Zine*, 2020

Kirby, *This Is Where I Get Off*, Permanent Sleep Press, 2019

Allison Kirk-Montgomery, *Loaded Revolvers: Ontario's First Forensic Psychiatrists*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008

Jónína Kirton, *An Honest Woman*, Talonbooks, 2017

Seth Klein, *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*, ECW Press, 2020

Handan Oral
Kurunc, IDA – Roots in Cloaks, Amazon KDP, 2020

Reuben
Lachmansingh, A Dip at the Sangam, Westbow Press, 2014

Léonard Lafleur,
Foundry Street, Lulu.com, 2020

Sonya Lalli, *Serena Singh Flips the Script*, Penguin Random House, 2021

Annick Lemay,
Midnight Thoughts: A Fusion Of Poetry And Visual Arts, Rutherford Press, 2020

Joanne Leow, *Escape Exercises*, Book*hug, 2023 (forthcoming)

Louella Lester, *Glass Bricks*, At Bay Press, 2021

Francesca M. LoDico, *Isabella & Vinnie Russo*, Guernica Press, 2021

Nadja Lubiw-Hazard, *The Nap-Away Motel*, Palimpsest Press, 2019

C.S. MacCath,
“Akhila, Divided.”
CLOCKWORK PHOENIX: Tales of Beauty and Strangeness, Mythic Delirium Books, 2008

Natalie MacLean,
Unquenchable, Doubleday Canada, 2011

Vera Maloff, *Our Backs Warmed by the Sun: Memories of a Doukhobor Life*, Caitlin Press, 2020

J.J. Martin, *Father Sweet*, Dundurn Press, 2019

Aric McBay, *Full Spectrum Resistance*, Seven Stories Press, 2019

M.J. McIsaac, *Boil Line*, Orca Book Publishers, 2019

Golden Millar, *F is for Feelings*, Free Spirit Publishing, 2014

Jocelyne Mullis,
Pearls, Pills & Vodka, Friesen Press, 2020

Kim Neville, *The Memory Collectors*, Atria Books, 2021

Hoa Nguyen, *Violet Energy Ingots*, Wave Books, 2016

Tolu Oloruntoba,
The Junta of Happenstance, Palimpsest Press, 2021

Treena Orchard,
Remembering the Body: Ethical Issues in Body Mapping Research, Springer Press, 2017

Jesse O'Reilly-Conlin,
Visiting Africa: A Memoir, Demeter Press, 2021

Lucy Pagé, *Lost Dog*, Cormorant Books, 2022 (forthcoming)

Annalisa Panati, *Vita e sogni di Mr. Pauli*, ScienzaExpress, 2020

Annabel Tippet,
Alex vs the Four-headed Gargantuan, James Lorimer & Company, Ltd., 2015

Gillian Pegg, *An Ember of Magic, The Princess: A Collection of Royal Tales*, Chipper Press, 2020

Susan Perly, *Stella Atlantis*, Wolsak and Wynn, 2020

Maria Reva, *Good Citizens Need Not Fear*, Knopf Canada, 2020

Vincenzo Pietropaolo, *Toronto in Photographs: Fifty Years of People*, Cormorant Books, 2022 (forthcoming)

Ayaz Pirani, *Kabir's Jacket Has a Thousand Pockets*, Mawenzi House, 2019

Emma Pivato, *Blind Sight Solution*, Cozy Cat Press, 2013

Paula Pryce, *The Monk's Cell: Ritual and Knowledge in American Contemplative Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2017

Adelle Purdham,
“You and Your School: Starting the Year Off Right,”
Canada's Down Syndrome Magazine, 2020

Cristina Quintero,
The Only Way to Make Bread, Tundra, 2023 (forthcoming)

Jim Reilly, *A Story of Creativity and Design*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2020

Mark Richardson,
Zen and Now, Knopf Doubleday, 2008

Ian Roy, *The Girl Who Could Fly*, Trap Door Books, 2021

Mike Ryan, *Hockey Now!* Firefly Books, 2019

David B. Savage,
Break Through to Yes: Unlocking the Possible Within a Culture of Collaboration, Elevate Publishing, 2016

Aaron Schneider,
Grass-Fed, Quattro Books, 2018

Philipp Schott, *The Willow Wren*, ECW Press, 2021

Conrad Scott,
Waterline Immersion, Frontenac House, 2019

Paula Sevestre,
The False Healer: A Trilogy, Amazon Kindle Direct, 2020

Leanne Shirliffe,
Sloth to the Rescue, Running Press Kids, 2019

Christian Smith,
The Scientist and the Psychic: A Son's Exploration of his Mother's Gift, Penguin Random House Canada, 2020

Jennifer Spruit,
A Handbook for Beautiful People, Inanna Publications & Education Inc., 2017

Glynn Stewart, *The Terran Privateer*, Faolan's Pen Publishing Inc., 2016

Richard Stursberg,
The Tower of Babble, Douglas & McIntyre, 2012

Michael Swan,
Here With Us: A Parish Guide to Serving People With Dementia, Novalis, 2021

Darcy Tamayose,
Odori, Cormorant Books, 2007

Erin Thomas,
Forcing the Ace, Orca Book Publishers, 2014

Julie Thompson,
Timeless Love, Tellwell Talent Inc., 2019

K.B. Thors, *Vulgar Mechanics*, Coach House Books, 2019

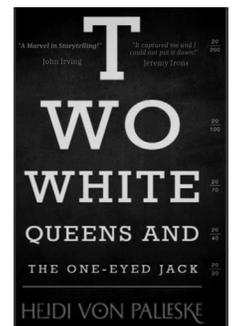
Daniel Scott Tysdal,
Fauxccasional Poems, Goose Lane, 2015

Jacqueline Valencia,
There's No Escape Out of Time, Insomniac Press, 2016

Paige Vanderbeck,
Green Witchcraft: A Practical Guide to Discovering the Magic of Plants, Herbs, Crystals, and Beyond, Rockridge Press/Callisto Media, 2020

Aziz Velji, *Calm Brain, Powerful Mind: Abolish Stress to Unleash Your True Potential*, Paper Lantern Publishing House, 2020

Heidi Von Palleske,
Two White Queens and the One-Eyed Jack, Dundurn Press, 2021



Martha Vowles,
Senior Management: Parenting My Parents, Nevermore Press, 2021

Jade Wallace,
Ophidia, Untethered, 2020

Helen Walsh, *Pull Focus*, ECW Press, 2021

Kathleen Whelan, *I Will Tell You When I Am Dead*, Hidden Book Press, 2017

Wendy Monica Winter,
Where's My Joey?, Kindle Direct Publishing, 2021

Janine Alyson Young, *Hideout Hotel*, Caitlin Press, 2014

Richard Zaric,
Hiding Scars, Sands Press, 2018

In Memoriam



Vince Agro

BY SIM MURTHY

1937–2020

Vince Agro was acting mayor of Hamilton, Ontario (1976/77) and a councillor of the Hamilton City Council (1970-76 and 1978-97) for 25 years. He was an award-winning author of two books, *The Good Doctor* and *In Grace's Kitchen*, and founder of Agro Insurance Inc., an insurance and employee benefits services company in Hamilton. He was a member of the Canadian Association of Recycling Industries for 30 years. Vince Agro passed away on September 4, 2020, at the age of 83, leaving behind his loving wife of 59 years, Angeline Gravino; his son, Anthony; son-in-law, Charlie Lopresti; and grandchildren. His daughter, Jennine Lopresti, had predeceased him. He also leaves behind a large circle of relatives and friends.

Vince Agro was born in 1937 on the north side of Hamilton, where many Italian-Canadian families lived. After completing his education at the King's College at the University of Western Ontario, Vince taught English for high school students. In 1970 at the age of 33, Vince was elected as one of the two councillors for Ward 2 in Hamilton. When Mayor Vic Copps suffered a heart attack in September 1976, he was elected to be the Acting Mayor. In the ensuing election for mayor, Vince lost to fellow councillor Jack McDonald. Vince was again elected Councillor for Ward 2 in 1978 and re-elected until he was defeated in 1997, when he was 60 years old.

During his tenure as councillor, Vince was instrumental in the construction of Hamilton Place, to house a music and cultural centre. Now renamed as FirstOntario Concert Hall, it provides a premiere venue for music concerts and performing arts in downtown Hamilton. It is also the home of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and Opera Hamilton. Vince also spearheaded the twinning of Hamilton with Racalmuto, Sicily, where his parents, Sam and Grace, were born and from where

many Italo-Canadians had immigrated to Canada. Twinning across the seas provides Racalmuto and Hamilton many religious and cultural links via internet and satellite communications.

While visiting an exhibition in Hamilton in 1999 depicting the war years in Europe, Vince noticed how during the war some Italo-Canadians were spotted for fascist tendencies following events in Europe. Vince was a nine-year-old boy when the war ended. In Canada, some Italo-Canadians were interned in Petawawa during the war. Vince wrote a letter to *The Spectator* pointing out that Italo-Canadians of Hamilton had supported the war efforts and protested that their contributions had not been recognized. After writing that letter, Vince enrolled himself in the nearby Mohawk College and took a course in Creative Writing. He then wrote a 500-page book of fiction entitled *The Good Doctor* based on the life of an uncle, Dr. Vincenzo Arcone, who had fought against fascist tendencies in the community. The book described the prejudices faced by Italo-Canadians at the hands of the government overreaction towards Italo-Canadians during the war years by interning many of them. The book described the everyday life of Italo-Canadians of Hamilton. The book was a finalist for the 2012 Giller Prize Readers' Choice contest. It was awarded The 2012 F. G. Bressani Literary Prize for Fiction written by Italo-Canadians.

He wrote a second book *In Grace's Kitchen*, which contained anecdotes, stories, memories, and recipes from the kitchens of his mother, Grace, and others in the neighbourhood whose recipes provided glimpses of Italo-Canadian life in Hamilton.

Vince leaves behind a legacy of a gifted pianist, an opera lover, successful businessman, English teacher, acclaimed community leader, and an award-winning writer that is a truly Renaissance man.



Catherine Macleod

BY VINCENZO PIETROPAOLO

1948–2021

In her memoir, *Waking Up in the Men's Room*, Catherine Macleod wrote that she “carried the working class like a locket in my fist.” We had a similar working class immigrant background and often shared a private joke about immigrants and the hard work that they performed as builders of their adopted country. She would look at me straight in the eye, mimic an Italian accent, and slowly utter a few words: “Canada: good country. Hard work.” We would nod our heads in approval, and smile conspiratorially at the mantra that had become a secret code for many immigrants like us.

Catherine Macleod was a writer who became a prominent activist in the labour movement, the arts, and the women's movement. She died on March 8, 2021, International Women's Day. A mere few hours before, she had sent a celebratory text message to her friends: a poster of legendary Mexican feminist and artist Frida Kahlo.

It would be a poignant goodbye for a woman born into poverty in Glasgow, Scotland, where her childhood years were spent in the aftermath of a war-ravaged city. She recalled the dire living conditions of her family in a poem: “there was a hole in each corner / and bed in the Glasgow tenement wall / for me, my mother, and my dad / who snored in his watch / and socks.” The family immigrated to Canada in 1957, eventually settling in the idyllic town of Kincardine, on Lake Huron, where her father, a millwright, found work building the Bruce Nuclear Generating Station. The setting would later give rise to one of her three plays, *Glow Boys*, about nuclear plant workers and the unsettling political contradictions in which they unwittingly found themselves.

Politics was foremost in her work: She became politicized soon after she moved to Toronto in 1968 to be part of the prevalent counterculture of the time. But first she had to overcome the same obstacles that she had faced in the conservative town she had left. When her law-school boyfriend counselled her not to attend university because a “bourgeois education would spoil a working-class girl like her,” she nonetheless enrolled at the University of Toronto in 1971. She took the first Women's Studies course offered and earned a B.A., no mean feat for a “working-class girl” in the early 70s.

University was a giant leap into a new world. It introduced her to Marxist analysis and feminism, which would henceforth become

the metrics that guided her life. Many years later she would write an astute feminist analysis of political culture in her memoir.

Macleod was a co-founder of the Canadian Women's Educational Press Collective (later the Women's Press) and the Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts, which has been running for almost 40 years. She helped establish the concept of labour arts as an integral part of unions. According to visual artist Carole Condé, “Catherine was the spark and energy that brought together people from the arts and the labour movement in the 1980s and '90s, and was the crucial link between all of us who were involved.”

I knew Macleod for about 30 years and collaborated with her in many artistic projects including her book of poetry, *Lessons Never Learned* (1995). She was the guiding force behind my book of photographs, *Celebration of Resistance*, for which she also wrote the text. The book chronicles the series of massive walkouts in eleven cities across Ontario between 1995 and 1998 by teachers and government and private sector workers, joined by community groups and arts organizations. Organized by Macleod and her colleagues at the Ontario Federation of Labour, the unprecedented action was aimed against the social and educational cuts imposed by the conservative provincial government of the day.

The climax occurred on October 26, 1996, in Toronto, when 250,000 people peacefully marched and sang their way from the CNE to Queen's Park. It was an exhilarating moment, and Macleod was at the centre of it all. One of my fondest memories is that I marched side by side with her in many of those eleven cities.

Catherine Macleod raised a son, Grayson Taylor, and when her best friend, Pat Schulz died, she became the guardian of her teenage daughter, Katherine.

One night her high school sweetheart unexpectedly came calling. She had not seen horticulturalist Martin Quinn in 30 years. They were both single parents, but their youthful love of the 1960s was rekindled. In 1992, Ms. Macleod married Mr. Quinn, finally deciding to “listen to my mother.” Martin became her devoted caregiver, and was at her side through to her final moments of life.

Catherine Macleod died of progressive supranuclear palsy (PSP) at home in Goderich, Ontario.



Mohammad Amin Akhtar Mirza

BY TARIQ MALIK

1937–2021

All those who knew and loved Amin Mirza will miss his unique presence amongst them and the dual worlds of creative fiction and scientific discovery that he inhabited.

Though he was my senior by several years, I always felt an affinity with the arc of his life; it paralleled mine in locating our origins, the eventual emigration from Pakistan, the move to occupations in scientific disciplines, and finally in retirement, a focus on creative endeavours. I regret that though we may have passed each other at a TWUC meeting or fundraiser or at an AGM, we never actually met, and now it is too late to rectify this oversight.

Mohammad Amin Akhtar Mirza was born in a small Punjabi village in the northwest of pre-independence India. He grew up in Pakistan before heading for Britain for his master's degree in chemistry. After graduation, he began his immigrant career by teaching at Acton Technical College, London, UK. Later, as a postgraduate research student in Biochemistry at King's College, he was awarded a doctorate degree by the University of London. After finishing higher education, Dr. Mirza continued to work as a research scientist in the U.S.A., Canada, and Germany, where he published extensively in virology and molecular biology. A member of the American Society of Microbiology, fluent in English, German, and some French.

Retiring to Quebec, Canada, Amin Mirza took up writing fiction in English. Apart from his scientific publications, he was the author of three works of science and historical fiction.

The first of these is the *Phagosome* (Pegasus, 2015). Here, the author drew extensively upon his early experiences in the western region of Pakistan and then in contemporary Canada and relied on his work as a research scientist to vivify his fictional world. The central ethos of the story revolves around Darwinian evolution theory and the physiological phenomenon of "Phagocytosis" in the perception of social, political, religious, and linguistic conflicts that beset the world. It is an exploration into fact and fantasy,

reality and dream, fascination and foulness, where the frontiers become diffused, creating an imaginary universe. The book's narrative has been described as offering a unique mosaic of characters of different cultural backgrounds and the events that shape their destinies in an impoverished quarter of a small town in contemporary Quebec against the backdrop of the La Belle Province sovereignty movement. Human beings of every hue are lost between holiness and hedonism, sacredness and secularism, trying to reconcile with the present in the changing kaleidoscope of Canadian and European societies. Its fascinating combination of passions, diverse sexual orientations, religions, and political leanings lends an irresistible ambiance to the narrative.

Amin Mirza followed this with his sophomore effort: *Shangri-La Lost* (Pegasus, 2015). Set in the Punjab valleys of colonial India at the tail end of the British Raj, the book introduces us to the erstwhile Shangri-La in the form of *Satputra* (Seven Sons), a place of good fortune and generosity of spirit where men and women of all faiths and political leanings can co-exist and thrive. However, even the hidden beauty of Satputra cannot escape the influence of wars fought thousands of miles away or the fate which awaits an Indian subcontinent seething with the desire for independence. Amin's final work was *Rosalia* (Vanguard Press, 2017). The central character of an impoverished and ill-fated Hungarian Gypsy girl Rosalia is born on the very first day the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. The story charts her life birth to a lonely death, as turbulent events beyond her control take over the world around her. Rosalia is thrust from misery to tragedy, glimpsing touching moments of humanity along the way. In a compelling tale that spans continents, Rosalia's life is defined by her relationships. It is a journey directed by world politics, marked by great hardship and poverty along the way, and occasionally relieved by short-lived episodes of joy and success.

Amin Mirza leaves behind the many vibrant worlds he created and populated with colourful characters for his readers.



Betty (Elizabeth Eileen) Nickerson

1922–2021

Betty Nickerson was born in Fort Scott, Kansas, and grew up in Oregon, the eldest of five siblings. As a young teenager during the Depression, she worked picking hops and prunes to help support the family. She always had a way with words and put herself through college on debating scholarships, eventually earning a B.A. in sociology from the University of Utah in 1946 and later an M.A. in sociology and agriculture from the University of Manitoba in 1967.

During the war years Betty worked as a radio broadcaster and speech writer and was involved in the civil rights movement. In 1954, after her first husband, Dr. Mark Nickerson, lost his university position during the dark days of McCarthyism, the family moved to Winnipeg. She was always grateful for the safe haven she found in Canada.

In Winnipeg Betty embarked on a career in television and from 1957 to 1963, she presented “Busy Fingers” a live arts and crafts program for youth. She became known ever after as the “Busy Fingers Lady.” Her young audience sent her vast quantities of artwork, some of which she traded for children’s art from other countries, amassing a huge collection from over fifty nations. She wrote two books using these pictures as illustrations: *How the World Grows Its Food*, 1965, and *Celebrate the Sun*, 1969. Passionate about the importance of youth’s creativity and role in society, she gave lectures and organized exhibitions across Canada and around the world. The Nickerson Collection of Children’s Art is now housed permanently in Gatineau, Quebec, at the Children’s Museum, part of the Canadian Museum of History.

In 1970 her concern for human rights spurred her to write *Chi - Letters from Biafra*, a chronicle of that terrible conflict.

From 1970 to 1981 she founded and ran All About Us/Nous Autres, a non-profit foundation to collect art, poems, and stories

from youth across Canada, organizing exhibitions and editing and publishing several books from the many thousands of submissions.

In 1982, Betty and her second husband, Dr. Seymour Trieger, moved to the West Coast, where a lifelong concern for the environment led her to become the first-ever federal candidate for the Green Party of Canada, running in a by-election in 1983 and in the general election a year later.

Betty was always involved in the women’s movement as well, and as she entered her senior years, she became concerned with the place of older women in our society. With the support of a Canada Council grant, she wrote *Old and Smart: Women and Aging in 1991*. The huge response to this book led her to organize Amazing Greys, a gathering and celebration of older women that took place for 4 years in Parksville, BC.

During this long and busy life, Betty received numerous honours, awards, and prestigious appointments including British Council Fellowship, 1966; India Arts Council Fellowship, 1967; Queen’s Jubilee Medal, 1977; Canadian Commissioner to UN International Year of the Child, 1979.

Betty was prolific and passionate about so many causes. At the age of 98-and-a-half, it seems fitting that she died just hours after the swearing in of the first woman, a woman of colour no less, as the Vice President of the United States. It represents much of what she stood for in her life.

She is survived and proudly remembered by her three children, five granddaughters, and four great-grandchildren.

“Keep your eyes on the stars, and do what’s possible.”

- Betty Nickerson



Heather Spears

BY CANDAS JANE DORSEY

1934–2021



HEATHER SPEARS'S DRAWING OF A PANEL AT THE 2013 AGM AND CONFERENCE IN OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CELEBRATING THE UNION'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY. FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: HARRY THURSTON, DAVID LEWIS STEIN, DAVID CHARIANDY, DIANE SCHOEMPERLEN.

At the death of people important to us, we discover anew the idea of superposition made familiar by Schrödinger and his famous cat. But unlike the story, the box is already open, and no avoidance can reverse the outcome. So no matter how long I put off writing these words, our dear Heather Spears is still gone.

Heather was a multi-discipline, multi-talented artist and writer, a teacher, a scholar of light, and a beloved friend to many friends and family members. TWUC members will remember her drawing all of us as we went about our AGMs, as she did at other literary events and meetings, producing vivid likenesses with a few deft lines. A few deft lines of poetry won her the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1989 for *The Word for Sand* (Wolsak & Wynn). Her eccentric and wonderful far-future speculative fiction, the *Moonfall* trilogy, was published to critical acclaim by Tesseract Books, and she also wrote a mystery novel.

Her books of drawings include the crisis drawings she collected in *Drawings from the Newborn: Poems and Drawings of Infants in Crisis* (1986), *Drawn from the Fire, Children of the Intifada* (1989), and *Massacre, Drawings from Jerusalem* (1990). She once described to us how she drew the Palestinian children covertly, on paper bags and other found paper, and smuggled them back through checkpoints. She had great courage in the face of death, war, sadness, and grief. Parents in pediatric ICU units who had no other image of their dying or dead child welcomed her portraits, and she drew their babies with compassion and grace.

Despite a long history, my best memory of Heather is always of her eternally refreshed and open gaze: it seemed that for her the world was always new. Her gaze was “childlike” in one sense, open and clear, but it was also wise and knowing. Heather was relentless and honest with her art and her writing, and she modelled that attitude in her many drawing workshops, the most popular of which began, literally, with the skull beneath the skin, to teach artists how to look at and draw the head. She also taught us to look at the edges of things in order to see the essence at the centre. Even in her eighties, she would drop to the floor to sketch with charcoal on oversized paper, then spring up to teach again. She could as easily draw the essence of a baby in crisis, a writer reading their work or arguing on behalf of Public Lending Right, a tired model at a workshop, or the trial of the killers of Reena Virk (where she served as courtroom artist and made over 500 drawings, then wrote poems and selected fifty drawings to accompany them for a book, also from Wolsak & Wynn).

Though her work always appears unforced and simple,

Heather's art was not unmediated by scholarship and intellect — but she had that gift of clarity to integrate knowledge, intellect, heart and soul in her fluid art. She was educated at the University of British Columbia, The Vancouver School of Art, and the University of Copenhagen, and her interest in the mechanics of art, the eye, and the perceptive brain culminated in *The Creative Eye: An artist's guide to unlocking the mysteries of visual perception* (Arcturus, 2007; illustrated edition 2012), a book about the hows and whys of seeing in art-making.

Heather was born in Vancouver in 1934, and from 1962 onward she split her year between Copenhagen, where she had a small studio and art gallery as an extension of her home, and Canada, where she travelled, taught, and visited friends and family. Between her first book in 1958 and her death, she published fifteen collections of poetry, five novels, illustrated numerous books and articles, and drew wherever she went. Most of her work was published in English, but not long before her death she had her first publication in Danish, when her 2007 book of poems *I Can Still Draw* (Wolsak & Wynn) was translated into Danish by Niels Hav as *Jeg kan stadig tegne* (2019). Her obituary in the *Vancouver Sun* tells us: “Specializing in drawing children, in particular premature and other threatened infants, she exhibited and travelled widely, drawing in hospitals in the Middle East, Europe, and America, and remained active, teaching, drawing and writing up until the end. Hundreds of her drawings are collected at the Welcome Trust, London, and the Merrill Collection, Toronto. The Heather Spears Archive is housed at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.” The tribute went on to quote Terry Pratchett: “No one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away.”

Heather Spears belonged to PEN, The League of Canadian Poets, The Writers' Union of Canada, SF Canada, The Society of Authors, and Tegnerforbundet af 1919 (Danish drawing association). She had four children: Lesley Morrison, Daniel Goldenberg (Tone), Benjamin Goldenberg (Charlotte), Simon Goldenberg (Christa); and is also survived by her brother Thomas Spears (Judy); grandchildren Christian, Tobias, and Johanna; cousin Gwen Pruden; and Lenny and Camilla Goldenberg.

And of course by us, her colleagues, her community, her friends, all who were the beneficiaries of her generous and stalwart gifts of friendship and inspiration, who will remember her with love and gratitude — for her art and heart and community spirit, but even more so for her generous presence in our lives.



Erno Rossi

BY JOSEPH PIVATO

1936–2021

Writer, teacher, and environmentalist Erno Delano Rossi passed away on February 16, 2021, in Welland, Ontario at the age of 84. He was born in Port Colborne, Ontario, to an Italian immigrant father and an American mother in 1936. He earned degrees from McMaster University and the University of Toronto's Teacher's College. In the summers, he worked in the local Inco Steel Mill to pay his university expenses. He taught history and sociology in Port Colborne High School for many years. He also earned an M.A. in environmental studies from Michigan State University. His many students remember Erno Rossi as a teacher who loved nature and would take classes out on field trips to physically experience the sights and sounds of the wild. He also taught survival techniques in the north woods. Students would see the history they were studying. All Rossi's books are nonfiction, and

focus on popular history. His first volume was *White Death: Blizzard of '77*, about the massive blizzard of 1977 which struck Southern Ontario and Upper New York State. It became a best-seller in 1978 and was reprinted in 2001. He published *Full Moon* in 1979, about the influence of the moon on the religion and folklore of different people. Rossi co-authored *Many Cultures — Many Heritages* in 1976 which was a popular Canadian history text used in high schools for many years. In 1984 he published *Shipwrecks: A Bicentennial Adventure*, about the history of ships lost on the Great Lakes. In 2006 we wrote *Crystal Beach: The Good Old Days*, a popular history of the amusement park and lakeside resort. In 2012 Rossi started the environmental group Friends of the Port Colborne Lighthouses, volunteers dedicated to save the Lake Erie lighthouses from being demolished. These lighthouses are now part of the Canal Days Marine Heritage Festival.

My first contact with Erno Rossi was in 1977 when I was doing pioneer research into the work of Italian-Canadian writers. He was very helpful with information. As an experienced world traveller, Rossi still identified with his Italian background. My work on Italian-Canadian authors and other ethnic minority writers in Canada has changed my career. Erno would be surprised by the twelve books that resulted from my list of curious questions from 1977.



Gloria Hunter-Alcock

1936–2021

Gloria Hunter-Alcock was born in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1936, but spent the majority of her life considerably farther north. Educated

in Thunder Bay, Ms. Hunter-Alcock became a nurse and midwife, taking her skills to England and Scotland for a spell before returning to Canada to run the nursing station in Tuktoyaktuk, on the shore of the Arctic Ocean in the Northwest Territories. After further training as a nurse practitioner, she opened the first nursing station in Resolute, in what is now Nunavut. She drew from this experience to write and publish her book, *Nurse at the Top of the World*. Ms. Hunter-Alcock worked across the north in various communities, including the Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (Grassy Narrows), and lived in Kenora, Ontario, for many years. Over the course of a very busy life, Gloria Hunter-Alcock travelled much of the world. She died on March 30, 2021, in Napanee, Ontario, in the company of friends and family.

Frank Smith

1928–2020

Frank Smith was born in England and lived the later part of his life in Victoria, BC. He received a Ph.D. in psycholinguistics

from Harvard University in 1967 and built a research and writing career around the subject of literacy and theories of reading. His studies and work took him across Europe, South Africa, Australia, and California until he settled into a professorship at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto. He wrote or co-authored sixteen books and numerous articles and essays around the science of reading and was one of the founding thinkers behind the “whole language” technique for the teaching of reading. Mr. Smith died late in 2020 in Saanich, BC.



Budge Wilson

BY JILL MACLEAN

1927–2021

Budge Wilson and I became friends only in the last twenty years of her life: We were part of a group of women who twice yearly took the train from Halifax to Rogersville, New Brunswick, for a writers' retreat at the Trappistine Abbey. Budge was our elder and as such was given the spacious corner room, where she would settle herself with cushions and her stenographer's notebook and write (she never used a typewriter or laptop because her fingers worked too fast for the story to have its due time to emerge). She was that rarity, a joyful writer, who told me she was so lazy that if she were an agonized writer, she'd never put pen to paper. She told another of our group, "I just splat it out and fix it up." Rational thinking in abeyance. No nasty critical voices berating in the background. Only the story, the all-important story.

All of us wrote at the abbey. But in the evening there were often shenanigans. I remember how Budge wrapped her face in a red cotton scarf so no one would recognize her — she, the shortest of our short story writers — and ventured through the door marked *Privé* into the forbidden corridors of a cloistered monastery. I also remember, as she aged and her balance deteriorated, how she would stand at the window waving as the rest of us left for a ramble across the fields; and the year she could no longer safely negotiate the stairs to the refectory and knew this would be her last stay at the abbey. She was never a complainer — one of the many things I admired about her — but how she must have missed those retreats devoted to writing yet mingled with companionship. She was a supportive, kind, and utterly discreet friend, and we all sensed that beneath her sociability, wit, and charm lay the bedrock of moral conviction and (unfashionable word) goodness.

She was a self-taught writer who began at age 50, persevered through 6 years of rejections, and in the next 33 years went on to publish 34 books, most of them for young readers. To list her awards requires an eight-line paragraph: I once typed them for a Nova Reads celebration. In addition, she was a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Nova Scotia and received honorary doctorates from Dalhousie University and Mount Saint Vincent University. None of this happened in a vacuum: She was a wife, mother, and grandmother, with a home base in Halifax and a beloved property on the ocean in Northwest Cove, where her

husband, Alan, had built her a small writing studio overlooking the sea.

When an intriguing character or a fraught emotion started hounding her, she would walk through the woods to that studio, and there she would venture into the shadowed corridors of her protagonists' minds and hearts until, eventually, the story would start to tell itself. Her stories are compassionate but never sentimental, for Budge was clear-eyed about the damage we can inflict on each other; their insights into family dynamics, school hierarchies, and the perils and pains of adolescence do not guarantee redemption, although she strongly believed in the human capacity for meaningful change.

She loved young people, always present to them in a way they could instantly recognize, and visited schools from Nanaimo to St. John's, from Guadalajara to Nain. She co-piloted a bush plane to a remote First Nation in northern Manitoba. After her flight was cancelled to the small Labrador community of Makkovik, she travelled 55 kilometres over rough sea ice on a Ski-Doo so as not to disappoint the children there, "...one of the most breathtaking and beautiful voyages I ever made."

As a longtime mentor to the literary community, her credo was simple: Prioritize creativity in your life. Read. Observe. Eavesdrop. Write it all down, paper your room with rejection slips, and get on with it.

She took her own advice. She wrote picture books, chapter books, short stories for teenagers and adults. At 79, she was commissioned to write the prequel for *Anne of Green Gables*, a novel she insisted was for adults. Six years later, she set up NorthWest Publishing and self-published one of her early books, *Breakdown*, which dealt with mental issues and which she felt deserved a wider readership. The publication of *After Swissair* took place when she was 89; she chose poetry for her 10-year struggle to honour the courage, trauma, and grief of those involved in the tragedy that occurred in the waters off Northwest Cove: not a joyful process, this, her last book.

She was constantly reinventing herself. She exemplified what an elderly woman can achieve. Budge Wilson will be greatly missed and long remembered. And her stories will live on.

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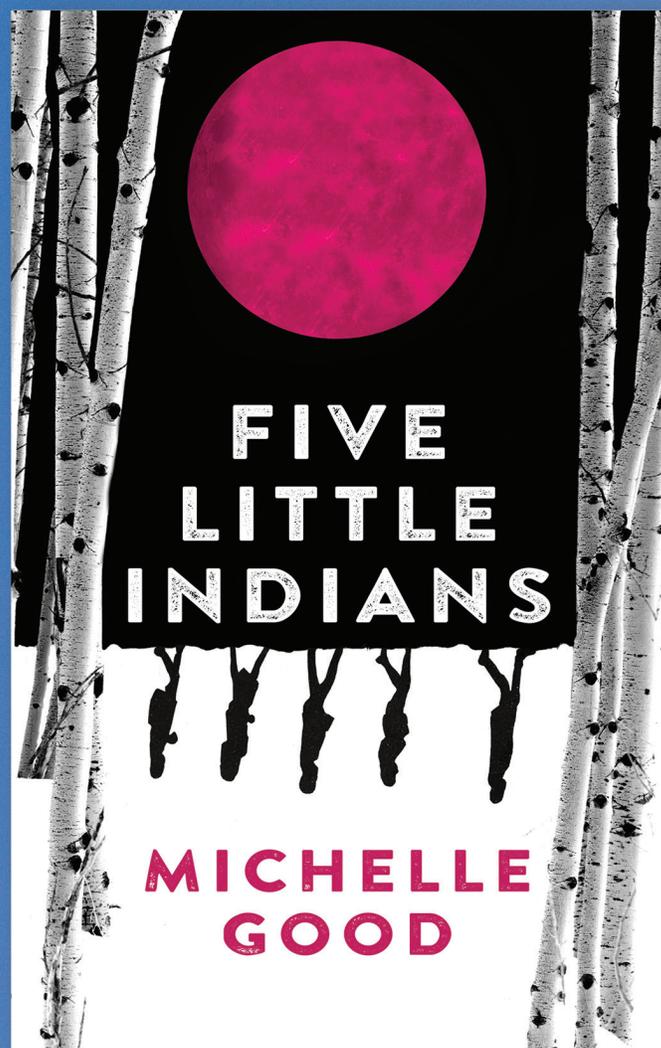
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