

east word

AWC announces winners of playwriting category



KELLY CLARK PHOTO

Rhys Bevan-John at the Robert Merritt Awards, honouring achievements in theatre arts.

Winners in the unproduced play category of the 35th Atlantic Writing Competition were celebrated at the Robert Merritt Awards, honouring excellence in Nova Scotian theatre arts, held at Casino Nova Scotia in Halifax on March 26. This is the second consecutive year the category has appeared in the AWC and the prizes have been presented at the Merritt Awards. The Unproduced Play category is co-sponsored by WFNS, Theatre Nova Scotia (TNS) and Playwrights Atlantic Resource Centre

(PARC). The first prize winner in this category also receives a free membership to TNS and a professional dramaturgy service from PARC.

The winners are:

- 1st: "Pump Trolley" by Rhys Bevan-John, Halifax, NS
- 2nd: "The Bouquet" by Janet Godsell, Wellington, NS
- 3rd: "Order in the House" by Nick Jupp, Halifax, NS

This year's final judge was playwright and screenwriter Josh MacDonald. His beginnings as a writer



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include a first prize in the short story category of the AWC in 1995 after three honourable mentions in previous years. Today, he is the writer of the play *Halo* and the feature film *The Corridor*.

Josh said, “My congratulations to all three finalists in this year’s playwriting category. The creators of these works impressed me greatly in their abilities to ‘think local,’ anticipating the practical, formal limitations an East Coast playwright faces in getting his/her work onto a stage: no cast sizes here larger than five actors, no multiple set changes, no crashing chandeliers or helicopters descending.

“For all their local pragmatics, however, these three playwrights also drew inspiration from diverse and grand theatrical works – there’s kinship in these new plays with pieces such as *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Waiting For Godot* and the solid, oaken stage mysteries of Agatha Christie. This, then, is what finally impressed me about this year’s winners and their new Atlantic plays: their refusal to be anything less than universal in theme, exploring life, death, being, nothingness, God, family, music, politics, ambition, and forgiveness in wide-ranging, but workable, ways. Plus, I got a couple of laughs along the way. I wish all three writers much continued success in creating local, universal works for the live stage.”

After Rhys accepted his prize in March, we sent him a couple of questions to learn more about “Pump Trolley” and his future plans for it.

Q. What is the inspiration for Pump Trolley?

Rhys: The inspiration was twofold. It was kind of the point where a couple of different thoughts and desires met.

My first inspiration for the play (which came second in the processes of the imagining of this show) was my brother, Nick Bevan-John’s music. I’m a huge fan of his music. He’s produced songs and albums since we were both teenagers. He makes his music and then shares it with a small circle of friends, but he doesn’t play many live gigs. I wanted to be able to put some of his songs in a theatrical context. I felt the poetry of them was so powerful, that I wanted them to be appreciated outside of someone’s iPod. My brother’s songs “Sparrow” and “Mrs. Bardot” became the dreamscape basis for one of the two characters in the play.

The second major influence for my writing this show was Marty Burt. Marty is a Newfoundland actor who lives and works in Halifax. He has been a great inspiration to me for years – the honesty and intensity that he brings to his work on stage is something that I desire to emulate in my own work as an actor.

About eight years ago, Marty and I first worked together at Shakespeare by the Sea. Late one night at one of the cast get-togethers, one of us brought up how neat those pump trolleys were – and how great an image it would be to have a show of just two guys on one of those things, occasionally singing ... I remember Marty saying offhandedly “I’d be in that show with you” and my little 24-year-old actor’s heart leapt. I thought if I was going to get the opportunity to play opposite this man, I may have to write the show myself.

The pump trolley idea promptly pumped its way to the back of my subconscious, and hung out there for a few years. When I had the idea of putting my brother’s songs into a show, I thought of Marty (who has a beautiful, rich singing voice) and the pump trolley squeaked its way out from the back of my brain.

Q. You’re producing your play yourself. How are you getting that done?

Rhys: Well, I wouldn’t exactly say that I was producing the play myself ... It’s more that a team has built itself around the show, and we are producing it.

Marty Burt read a very early draft, and it was with his encouragement that I continued to work on it. I asked Ann Marie Kerr if she would be interested in directing the show – after reading it, she jumped on board the trolley too. After writing and failing to receive a Canada Council grant for a workshop, I asked a friend and neighbour Andria Wilson, who runs her own theatre company – Left Foot First – and also works with 2B Theatre as their producer, for advice. She gave me the sound advice of asking her to produce the show.

After seeing Andria at work for little over a week, it is clear to me why her job is a job in and of itself. Her producer brain thinks in directions I couldn’t find with a map and a compass. And Ann Marie has a genius mind, and I get the feeling that she sees a better show than the one I have written, which is the right kind of director to have. She and Andria are a godsend. Without them, I doubt that this project would get very far. So far they have added Leigh Ann Vardy as a lighting designer, and Andrew Cull as set designer.

We’re still scratching around for the rest of the team, but it really feels like we’ve got a lot of momentum so far. Watching everyone bring their own spheres of artistry to the show in the past few weeks has been like watching it take its first steps on its own. It’s overwhelmingly exciting. ■

Rhys and his team, working under the name Misery Loves (theatre) Company, are aiming for a spring 2013 debut for *Pump Trolley*.

Finalists in the 35th AWC

Since January, first-round judging teams in all six categories have been evaluating this year’s entrants in the Atlantic Writing Competition. The finalist manuscripts listed below will be handed over to the final judges in each category who will select the eventual winners. The winners will be announced in August, with the first-prize winners taking the stage for readings at The Word on the Street Book and Magazine Festival, September 23, in Halifax.

Creative Non-Fiction

“Auf Wiedersehen Pluto”	“A Pillar Against Perfection”
“Divine Intervention”	“Open Door”
“Pieces”	“Top of the Swing”

Novel

“Falling Ice”	“Little Black Dots of Heat”
“Tiny Little Oswalds”	“To Opening Night”
“The View From Errisbeg”	“Whiz-Bang Fantastic”

Poetry

“Let Me Take You Somewhere”	“Verve”
“Comfort Me With Apples”	“Word Play”
“Big As A Cloud On A Prairie Sky”	
“Orientations Syria”	

Young Adult Novel

“Juggling Time”	“Land of Children”
“Unobtanium”	“Secrets of the Hotel Maisonneuve”

Short Story

“Cair Paravel”	“Candy Apple”
“The Christmas Kitten”	“Concha’s Smile”
“The Fish”	“Peaches”
“The Train Journey”	“Thalia”
“I Lied About Liking Dogs”	“Ghost Writer”
“I Learned About Love From A Fairy Tale”	

Writing For Children

“Monarchs”	“Ordinary Day”
“The Precious Stone”	“Advent of the Seasons”
“Hugging My Jenny Lind”	“Tricksters”
“Sue and the Faerie Kingdom”	
“Christmas and the Wicked Old Witch”	
“Callista, the Amazing Honeybee, Tells All”	

26 books nominated for 9 Atlantic Book Awards

The Atlantic Book Awards and Festival runs from May 10 to 17 with free literary events taking place in all four Atlantic Provinces. Details are available at www.atlanticbookawards.ca. Winners will be announced on May 17 in St. John's, Newfoundland, marking the first time this event has ventured outside Nova Scotia.

Ann Connor Brimer Award for Children's Literature

Vicki Grant, *Betsy Wickwire's Dirty Secret* (HarperCollins Canada)
Gloria Ann Wesley, *Chasing Freedom* (Roseway Publishing)
Susan White, *The Year Mrs. Montague Cried* (Acorn Press)

APMA Best Atlantic-Published Book Award, sponsored by Friesens

Eco-Innovators: Sustainability in Atlantic Canada by **Chris Benjamin** (Nimbus Publishing)
Salmon Country by Doug Underhill, photographs by André Gallant (Goose Lane Editions)
That Forgetful Shore by Trudy J. Morgan-Cole (Breakwater Books)

Dartmouth Book Award for Non-fiction

Carol Campbell and James F. Smith, *Necessaries and Sufficiencies: Planter Society in Londonderry, Onslow and Truro, 1761-1780* (Cape Breton University Press)
Dianne Marshall, *Heroes of the Acadian Resistance* (Formac Publishing)
Harry Thurston, *The Atlantic Coast: A Natural History* (Greystone Books, in association with the David Suzuki Foundation)

Democracy 250 Atlantic Book Award for Historical Writing

Carol Campbell and James F. Smith, *Necessaries and Sufficiencies: Planter Society in Londonderry, Onslow and Truro, 1761-1780* (Cape Breton University Press)
James E. Candow, *The Lookout: A History of Signal Hill* (Creative Book Publishing)
Jacques Poitras, *Imaginary Line: Life on an Unfinished Border* (Goose Lane Editions)

Jim Connors Dartmouth Book Award (Fiction)

Mary Rose Donnelly, *Great Village* (Cormorant Books)
Bruce Graham, *Diligent River Daughter* (Pottersfield Press)
Frank Macdonald, *A Possible Madness* (Cape Breton University Press)

Lillian Shepherd Memorial Award for Excellence in Illustration

Doretta Groenendyk, *Thank You for My Bed* (Acorn Press)
Patsy MacKinnon, *A Day with You in Paradise* by Lennie Gallant (Nimbus Publishing)
Sydney Smith, *Monkeys in My Kitchen* by Sheree Fitch (Nimbus)

Margaret and John Savage First Book Award

Heather Jessup, *The Lightning Field* (Gaspereau Press)
Michael Murphy, *A Description of the Blazing World* (Freehand Books)
Riel Nason, *The Town That Drowned* (Goose Lane Editions)

Newfoundland and Labrador Book Award for Fiction

Gerard Collins, *Moonlight Sketches* (Creative Book Publishing)
Kevin Major, *New Under the Sun* (Cormorant Books)
Patrick Warner, *Double Talk* (Breakwater Books)

The Bruneau Family Children's/Young Adult Literature Award

Andy Jones, *Jack and the Manger* (Running the Goat Books & Broadsides)
Susan M. MacDonald, *Edge of Time* (Breakwater Books)
Janet McNaughton, *Dragon Seer's Gift* (HarperCollins Canada)

Short shorts with some of the ABA shortlist

Here are some "short shortlist" interviews – one-question check-ins with some of the WFNS members nominated for Atlantic Book Awards in 2012.



A Possible Madness, Frank MacDonald

In *A Possible Madness*, a global corporation plans a daring scheme to exploit the remaining coal from a seemingly inaccessible source in the fictional Cape Breton town of Shean. Politicians try to marginalize the few voices of dissent, yet some of those voices are not so easily silenced. "MacDonald raises issues one might find in sociological studies, in environmental debates, and in the political arena, yet he consistently brings these topics down to an emotional and personal level that speaks directly to the reader," says Trevor Sawler in *The Nashwaak Review*.

Q. A Possible Madness is so authentic to its sense of place and the issues that place must face, it must resonate deeply with readers from the area. Is there a particularly interesting bit of feedback or response to the novel that you'd like to share.

The overall response has been gratifying, but the real surprise came upon learning that *A Possible Madness* has been made mandatory reading for a Masters of Business Administration program at the Edmonton campus of the University of Alberta. The course's designer, Dr. Tom Urbaniak, an associate professor of political science at Cape Breton University, explained to the publisher that while Shean, the imaginary town I use to act out my fantasies, "is fictional, it is very easy to imagine just such a scenario playing out in hundreds of small communities across the country."

The assignment for the students is to develop a sustainable economic development program for Shean. What is important to me as the author is that Urbaniak focuses on the heart of what I was hoping to get at with the story, the vulnerability of rural, depopulated, struggling towns and villages to the will – or whims – of large, exploitive corporations.



Chasing Freedom, Gloria Wesley

"*Chasing Freedom* is a big story, fashioned from small, powerful moments, and a fine contribution to the literature of arrivals and encounters," says Sarah Ellis in *Quill and Quire*. Sarah Redmond, a slave on a South Carolina plantation, watches her father steal away to join the British army during the American Revolution. Before he can return, the war draws to a close and the Loyalist slaves are freed – yet when Sarah and her grandmother begin their new lives in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, it's clear the struggle for freedom has only just begun.

Q. After three books of poetry – To My Someday Child (1975), Woman, Sing (2002) and Burlap and Lace (2007) – you've published your first novel, Chasing Freedom. If poetry is the result of choices of words, then novels are the

result of the combined details of plot and character. How did you transition from poems to a novel?

The transition from writing poetry to writing a novel was an act of trial and error, reading how-to books and inspiration. My muse came to direct my thoughts and hand at all hours of the day and night. Through her, I created scenes, often finding myself struggling with internal conflicts and frequently amazed by the results when I reviewed my efforts.

I find the most delicious writing task is in finding the exact, most descriptive word to convey what my senses perceive. In both genres, it is the power of words that enables readers to transcend time and space. But unlike poetry, writing *Chasing Freedom* was a complicated process in which I endeavoured to enable readers to gain new perspectives and knowledge through characters like Sarah, Lydia, Margaret and Fortune. There were times when I felt like a juggler, throwing plates into the air and trying to decide when to let them land, while all the time, keeping the reader intrigued.

I'm an avid researcher of Black history and had produced several booklets about Black Loyalists, and so, once the plot became clear, the characters, settings and events were a matter of interweaving the historical record with my imagination. Discovering the power of writing a historical novel was the best part – the ability to lift unknown facts from yellowed pages and allow them to speak, sing, dance, weep and tell their own story.



Betsy Wickwire's Dirty Secret, Vicki Grant

"I have a new hilarious Canadian author to worship and her name is Vicki Grant," says the book blog Lavender Lines. "I hugged this book so much as I read it that it took me a week to finish. Funny, realistic, heart-aching, heartwarming, cringe-worthy awesomeness."

Betsy Wickwire's Dirty Secret finds Betsy kicking off her summer with a disastrous prom-related incident that torpedoes her relationships with both her boyfriend and her best friend. Determined to start over, Betsy, guided by her new green-haired pal Delores Morris, co-founds a cleaning service that grants her access to dirty secret after dirty secret – and eventually forces her to deal with secrets of her own.

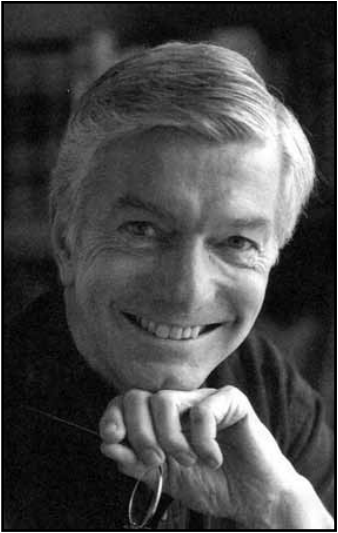
Q. This is such an original, unpredictable story – how did the plot elements come together? Are you a writer who composes a pre-planned story from start to finish, or did you let this story guide you as you wrote and take you to surprising places?

I never plan anything out from start to finish – in life or in writing – but this book still took me on a loopier goose chase than most. I hadn't even planned to write it. A couple years ago, I found out that cleaning ladies were making \$20 an hour. That inspired me to try and convince my teenage daughters to start a cleaning service. My campaign bombed but the look on their faces – "You want us to do what?" – provided the impetus for *Betsy Wickwire's Dirty Secret*.

Pampered teenagers cleaning strangers' toilets: It seemed like the perfect set-up for a YA comedy. Somehow, though, it just wasn't playing out on the page.

The problem was that I didn't enjoy writing flat-out farce. I like a little sad or serious with my funny. I struggled with the first draft until, about a third of the way through, I got an email from someone I'd known in high school. It was just a nice "how-are-you" note saying she'd seen my picture in the paper and wasn't the least bit surprised to see that I was an author. I'd "always been so confident," she said.

Her comment really threw me. Confident was the last word I would have used to describe my adolescent self. Ashamed was more like it. Everything I did, said, wore, thought was wrong and I was to blame. Remembering that sense of mortification sent Betsy Wickwire on an entirely different path. It dawned on me that cleaning houses wasn't about making money for her. It was about shame and self-flagellation. She'd done something to lose her social position and this was how Betsy was punishing herself. That made a whole bunch of sense to me. It also turned out to be not a bad set-up for some gags.



Diligent River Daughter, Bruce Graham

Born in 1900 in Parrsboro, Charlene Durant is 14, an assistant to her father travelling throughout Nova Scotia selling tombstones. Her mother is dead and her father is an aging Lothario, unpredictable and miserable when the army refuses to enlist him to fight in World War I. However, in 1916 the army is desperate and sends him to France. Betrayed and hurt, Charlene leaves for Boston, where she lies about her age to get a job on a newspaper. She fights for her identity and independence in a rapidly changing world.

Q. One could say your past novels dealt with men living in a man's world. How did you approach writing your first female protagonist's story (in the first person, no less), and did your experience as a journalist inform how you portrayed the world Charlene entered into when she took the job at a Boston newspaper?

I guess I got the idea of telling a story through the eyes of a young woman after reading Joyce Carol Oates' novel, *What I Lived For*. I marveled at her ability to so thoroughly get inside a man's head. The challenge appealed to me. The trick was writing in the dialogue of the day. I went to family diaries and other writings from that era. It took a while to get Charlene's voice the way I wanted it.

I don't think my journalism background had as much to do with the newsroom settings as my keen interest in the early nineteen hundreds – that time before the Great War at the cusp of a big transition. However, I did have a photo of my grandfather's office in Connecticut in 1919 and in part I borrowed from that photo when describing some of the settings of those early Boston newsrooms.



Thank You For My Bed, Doretta Groenendyk

"Groenendyk's beautiful artwork is what really makes this book special," writes Claire Perrin in *CM Magazine*. *Thank You For My Bed* also features Doretta's words, which illustrate in concert with her artwork how children of different cultures across the world appreciate the comfort and coziness of a place to rest their head.

Q. Your shortlisted book is Thank You For My Bed. Its story is of children everywhere tucking into bed each night, indicating that the routine of bedtime is universal. What is your routine of writing and illustrating?

Because I have always worked with kids at home I have never really had a routine. This is the first year they are all in school and still I find my work habits weather-based and random.

I also do not have a studio and tend to work where I can stir the soup, answer the phone, fix a toy, respond to a homework question or catch another episode of *30 Rock* ... When it's rainy and cold I get a lot of painting and chocolate eating done. When it's sunny (and no one is home with the flu) I am more likely to be in the woods somewhere. Always I am observing and always there are stories in my head.

I can say though, on a beautiful day I will set up my palette and canvas outside on our porch and gleefully paint in front of the meadow. This sounds romantic and I guess it is. It settles me to be out doors and if I can paint or write there it is wonderful, (except when they are spreading manure and then it stinks). ■

Markets, etc.

■ **Roseway Publishing anthology of political fiction:** Editor Sandra McIntyre with Roseway Publishing (Nova Scotia and Manitoba) is looking for short stories for an anthology of political fiction. Deadline June 1. “Political” is open to interpretation – stories can be about politics, whether overtly or obliquely, or political by virtue of their stance, voice, point of view or underpinnings. Stories up to 4,000 words. Short graphic fiction is welcome. Simultaneous, multiple and previously published submissions are okay. Payment is \$100 for “anthology rights” (print and electronic rights). Send stories by email to sandra@sandralit.com or Sandra McIntyre c/o Roseway Publishing, 32 Oceanvista Lane, Black Point, NS B0J 1B0. To receive confirmation that your story has been received, include an email address or a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your submission.

■ **The Capilano Review** (www.thecapilanoreview.ca) Upcoming Issues: Issue 3.18 (Fall 2012) will be an open issue, June 15 deadline. Issue 3.19 (Winter 2013) will be a special issue on narrative, October 1 deadline. Has a long history of publishing new and established Canadian writers and artists who are experimenting with or expanding the boundaries of conventional forms and contexts.

■ **Existere** (www.yorku.ca/existere) publishes bi-annually. Accepting submissions for the Fall/Winter 2012/2013 issue. Deadline is June 30. Now pays a small honourarium to writers and artists upon publication. The exact rates vary by length of submission. Looking for prose (up to 3,500 words), postcard stories, poetry.

Contests

■ **The Antigonish Review:** (www.antigonishreview.com) 2 writing contests – **Sheldon Currie Fiction Prize:** deadline May 31 postmark. Stories on any subject. Total entry not to exceed 20 pages. **Great Blue Heron Poetry Contest:** deadline June 30. Poems on any subject. Total entry not to exceed 4 pages. Maximum 150 lines. Entries might be one longer poem, or several short poems. Prizes in both competitions: 1st \$600 & publication, 2nd \$400 & publication, 3rd \$200 & publication. Entry fee \$25. Details on website.

■ **Room Magazine’s Annual Fiction, Poetry, and Creative Non-fiction Contest:** (www.roommagazine.com) Calling all women writers: sharpen your pencils or fire up your laptop and send your fiction, poetry, or creative non-fiction contest entries. Deadline: Entries must be postmarked or e-mailed no later than June 15. Entry fee: \$30 per entry. Prizes: 1st prize in each category \$500, 2nd prize \$250. Winners will be published in a 2013 issue. Other manuscripts may be published. Poetry: max. 3 poems or 150 lines. Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction: max. 3,500 words. Electronic entries accepted. Details on website.

■ **2012 Constance Rooke Creative Nonfiction Prize:** The Malahat Review, The University of Victoria, P.O. Box 1700 Stn CSC Victoria, B.C. V8W 2Y2 (http://web.uvic.ca/malahat) Deadline August 1 postmark. Entry fee \$35 (includes subscription). Prize \$1,000 for the best work (between 2,000 and 3,000 words) submitted to the magazine’s annual contest for a genre that embraces, but is not limited to, the personal essay, memoir, narrative nonfiction, social commentary, travel writing, historical accounts, and biography, all enhanced by such elements as description, dramatic scenes, dialogue, and characterization. No restrictions as to subject matter or approach apply. For example, the entry may be personal essay, memoir, cultural criticism, nature writing, or literary journalism. Details on website.

■ **Lake: A Journal of Arts and Environment** Dept. of Creative Studies, FIN 161, University of British Columbia Okanagan, 3333 University Way, Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7 (www.lakejournal.ca) Invites submissions of creative non-fiction on the topic of “Places That Shape Us.” Prize: \$250 and publication. Deadline: June 15. Length: 2500 words maximum Entry Fee: \$20, includes a one year subscription. Details on website.

■ **Riddle Fence:** PO Box 7092, St. John’s, NL A1E 3Y3 (www.riddlefence.com) Win big prestige, publication and four days at Piper’s Frith: Writing at Kilmory, an intense writing experience held every October in Newfoundland. Deadline: August 3 postmark. Stories must be in some form of English (any dialect); maximum of 4,000 words. Entry fee \$35 (includes a one-year subscription). Details on website, open to email submissions.

Impressed – New books by WFNS members

Together in Time

Jane Baskwill

www.janebaskwill.com ISBN: 978-0-9879390-0-5

Eleven year old Lori feels her life is boring and longs for the excitement of the good old days described by her grandfather. Caught up in a race to save Roxbury, an old abandoned settlement near her home, from destruction by a large gravel company, she’s involved in an intriguing mystery complete with chases on horseback, an elusive girl named Elizabeth, a hidden cemetery, and a series of puzzling coincidences that leave her wondering if what she has seen is real or imaginary.

Educator, consultant and writer, Jane Baskwill has authored many professional books and articles for teachers, in addition to several children’s picture books.

Hummingbird

John Wall Barger

Palimpsest Press, May 2012, \$18, ISBN: 978-1-926794-08-2

The Portuguese word for hummingbird is *beija-flor* – flower-kisser. In Aztec mythology, Huitzilopochtli is the hummingbird god, the bloodthirsty god of war, requiring nourishment in the form of constant human sacrifices to ensure the sun will rise again. In *Hummingbird*, Barger documents his recent itinerant years in closely observed, honest, and sometimes surreal episodes. The hummingbird is a territorial, aggressive creature whose life depends upon its quest for fuel, compelling it to taste up to 1,000 flowers per day. Its pulse, as it flies 800 kilometres across the Gulf of Mexico, can rise up to 21 beats per second. In these gritty poems, the furor of the hummingbird’s desire to survive and the roving spirit of the poet merge to compel a reading of life in flux that is at once breathtaking, agitated and fragile.

John Wall Barger’s first book of poems, *Pain-proof Men*, was published with Palimpsest Press in September 2009.

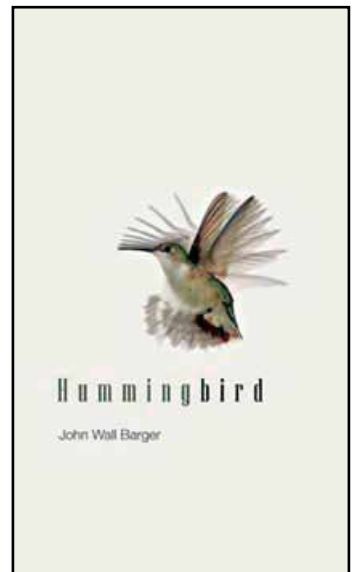
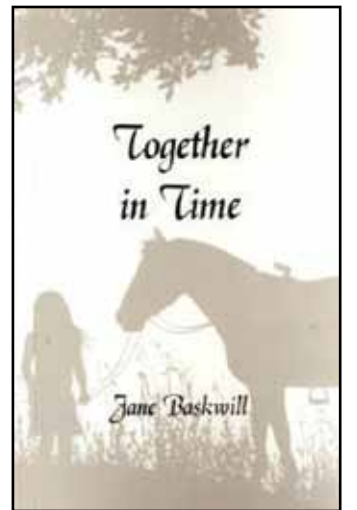
A Certain Grace Stories

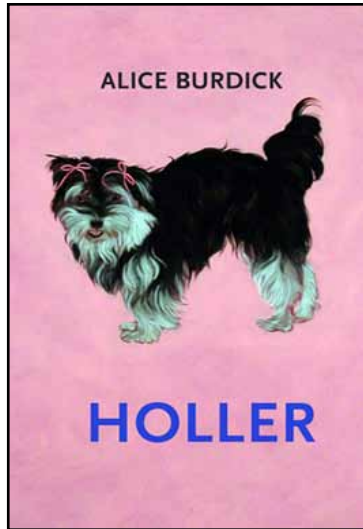
Binnie Brennan

Quattro Books, Spring 2012, \$16.95, ISBN 978-1-926802-84-8

In the tradition of Alice Munro and Carol Shields, Binnie Brennan examines the minutiae of ordinary life. During a tipsy night out escaping the frustrations of daily life, two middle-aged teachers try their luck at scoring a joint. A trucker drives an injured butterfly to its breeding ground in Florida. Struggling with sorrow over the death of her ex-husband, a single mother questions her place in her family’s lives. And when a friendly stranger shares his good nature, a middle-aged dressmaker takes her fantasy life too far. Miniatures of a much-loved grandfather’s life bring a lightness and deft humour, rounding out this debut collection, richly told in spare prose.

Binnie Brennan’s novella *Harbour View* (Quattro Books) was shortlisted for an Atlantic Book Award. A graduate of Queen’s University and the Humber School for Writers where she was mentored by M.J. Vassanji and Alistair MacLeod, Binnie lives in Halifax, where she is a member of Symphony Nova Scotia.





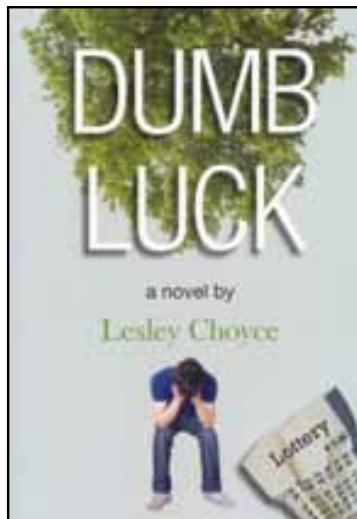
Holler

Alice Burdick

Mansfield Press, April 2012, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-894469-70-8

In this poetry collection, former big-city dweller Alice Burdick explores nature and the small town. With a blend of playful narrative and an Ashberyesque collage approach, Burdick paints a portrait of our world as one of continuous wonder, and full of relationships – between people, and between people and things – that never die but continually transform, even in death.

Alice Burdick lives in Mahone Bay. Her work has appeared in various magazines. She is the author of many chapbooks and two full-length poetry collections, *Simple Master* (Pedlar Press) and *Flutter* (Mansfield Press).



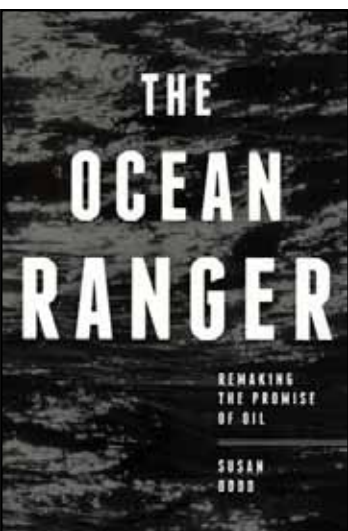
Dumb Luck

Lesley Choyce

Red Deer Press, fall 2011, \$12.95, ISBN:0-88995-465-8

Brandon DeWolf knows he is not the sharpest knife in the drawer. He tends to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, has no real ambitions, and seems to be at a dead end. Two days before his 18th birthday everything changes for Brandon. First he falls out of a tree and survives intact. Then he picks up a lottery ticket, and discovers he's won three million dollars.

Lesley Choyce once said that a voice in his head told him: "Write about what makes you feel the most uncomfortable." The award-winning author of 70 books for children, teens, and adults is always a fresh voice, challenging his readers to explore new paths, try out different attitudes.



The Ocean Ranger

Remaking the Promise of Oil

Susan Dodd

Fernwood Publishing, January 2012, \$24.95, ISBN 978-1-5526-464-3

On February 15, 1982, the oil rig Ocean Ranger sank off the coast of Newfoundland taking the entire crew of 84 men – including the author's brother – down with it. It was the worst sea disaster in Canada since the Second World War, but the memory of the event gradually faded into a sad story about a bad storm.

Resurrecting this disaster from the realm of "history," Susan Dodd argues that power, money and collective hopes for the future revised the story of corporate indifference and betrayal of public trust into a "lesson learned" by a heroic industry advancing technology in the face of a brutal environment. This book is a navigational resource for other disaster aftermaths, including that of the Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico, and a call for vigilant government regulation of industry in all its forms.

Susan Dodd is an assistant professor in the Foundation Year Program at the University of King's College in Halifax.

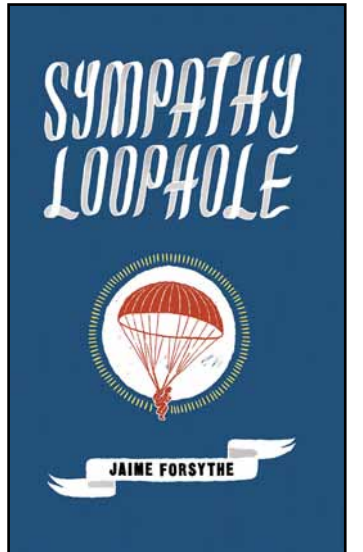
Sympathy Loophole

Jaime Forsythe

Mansfield Press, April 2012, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-894469-74-6

This lively first collection of poetry, often both creepy and hilarious, serves up an image-laden universe – the sideshow we call home – where contortionists, womanizing ventriloquist dummies, and pickled sharks compete with the everyday for the mark's hard-earned buck. Jaime Forsythe's poetry is loaded with wit, mystery, surprise, and breathtaking juxtapositions – it's a contemporary inventory of pop culture and human experience that proves the wacky and the poignant can share a seat in the same roller-coaster of a stanza.

Jaime Forsythe is a poet, fiction writer, editor, and journalist. Her work has appeared in a number of magazines and journals. She is a regular arts contributor to *The Coast*, and the editor of the fiction anthology *Transits* (Invisible Publishing). A graduate of the University of Guelph's Creative Writing MFA program, she lives in Halifax.



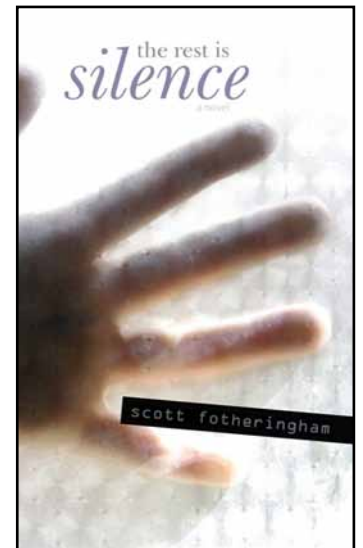
The Rest is Silence

Scott Fotheringham

Goose Lane Editions, April 2012, \$29.95, ISBN: 978-086492-656-2, e-book 978-0-86492-745-3

Eco-terrorism and future shock – in an epic tale that travels from New York to Nova Scotia. In the backwoods of Nova Scotia, a man withdraws himself from the world. He fills his days with planting a garden. Building a cabin. Carving out friendships. Falling in love. His nights are for storytelling. A yarn of youthful passions, of idealism and hope, of science and rebellion. Outside the forests, news reports trickle in. A worldwide catastrophe is unfolding. People are frightened. Governments are in turmoil. The future is uncertain. As the man continues his story, we learn the consequences of believing we were ever ready to open Pandora's Box.

Scott Fotheringham, who holds a PhD from Cornell University in molecular genetics, used his experience as a research scientist in New York to write this novel. He now lives and writes near Ottawa, after a sojourn near Halifax. As an unpublished manuscript *The Rest is Silence* won the H.R. Percy Novel Prize in the 2008 Atlantic Writing Competition.



White Eyes

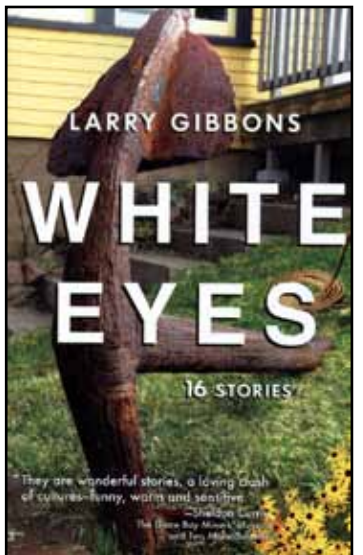
16 Stories

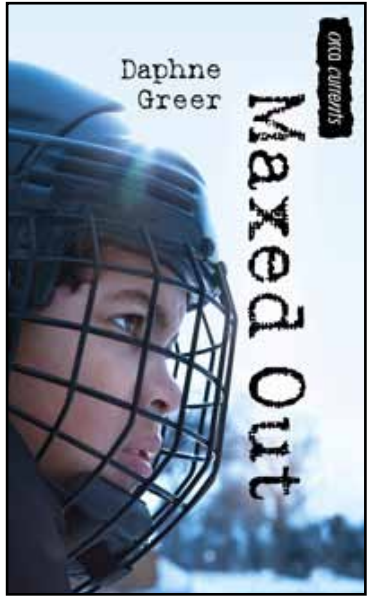
Larry Gibbons

Breton Books, November 2011, \$17.95, ISBN 978-1-926908-07-6

A unique perspective, and insight to match, spring from Gibbons 10 years on a Mi'kmaq reserve in Cape Breton and his love for a native woman. Stirred by the tenderness, tenacity, and flexibility of the Mi'kmaq extended family, and challenged by a native spirituality so different from his own upbringing, he found himself as a writer. These stories, told through white eyes, are a rare and extraordinary achievement in Canadian short fiction. Sometimes he gets it right. Often he is the confused white man, but in all cases, story by story, he delivers terrific reading – compassionate, often comic and absolutely unique.

Born in 1948 and a graduate of Queen's University and St. Lawrence College, Larry Gibbons is a former library clerk, photo technologist, and veterinary technologist. He spends as much time as he can in Cape Breton.





Maxed Out

Daphne Greer

Orca Currents, March 2012, \$9.95, ISBN: 9781554699810

Twelve-year-old Max wants to play hockey like he used to. But since the death of his dad, his mom does more crying than mothering, and Max has to take Duncan, his special-needs brother, with him everywhere he goes. The team needs Max to win the upcoming game, but one practice with Duncan makes it evident that it's not safe to leave him unattended on the sidelines. With only a week to figure out how he can play in the big game, Max is feeling the pressure. Will he find a way to be a good teammate, a good brother and a good son, or is it too much for one kid?

Daphne Greer worked with individuals with special needs for 16 years. *Maxed Out* is her first novel. She lives in Newport, Nova Scotia.

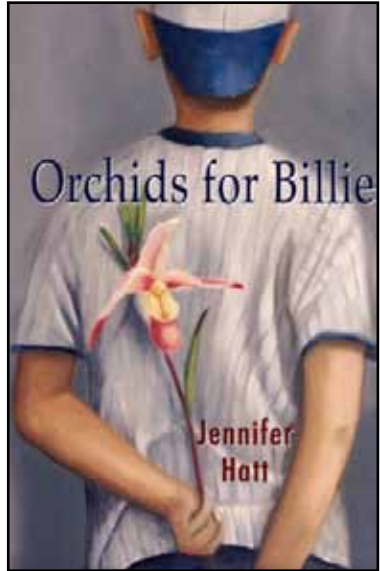
Orchids for Billie

Jennifer Hatt

Marechal Media, \$18, ISBN: 978-0-9867576-2-4 (www.FindingMaria.com)

This is the timeless story of an 8-year-old boy's determination to save his family, while learning that those things appearing ugly and dark can lead to the greatest prize of all. In the summer of 1955, Jack's days are filled with baseball, until the moving truck arrives and he faces the realities of his life: his mother is sick, his father is gone, and his new home will be hundreds of miles away with his grandparents. Jack discovers his grandmother's greenhouse. If he could grow his mother a prize orchid surely he could fix their broken family.

Jennifer Hatt lives in New Glasgow. A freelance writer, her articles have appeared in national and international newspapers and magazines. She's the author of *Finding Maria*.



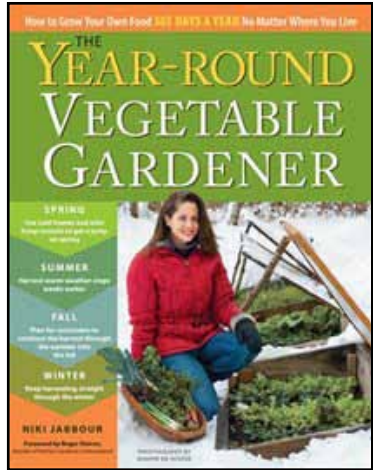
The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener

Nikki Jabbour

Storey Publishing, November 2011, \$19.95 U.S., ISBN: 978-1-60342-568-1

Nova Scotia-based gardener and writer Niki Jabbour shares her secrets for growing food during every month of the year. Her season-defying techniques, developed in her own home garden are doable, affordable, and rewarding. She provides in-depth instruction for all of her time-tested techniques and offers complete instructions for making affordable protective structures that keep vegetables viable and delicious throughout the colder months. The book details Niki's favourite crops and the sneaky season extenders that she uses to harvest 12 months a year.

Niki Jabbour is a prolific garden writer whose work appears in newspapers and magazines across North America. She's the host of The Weekend Gardener, a call-in radio show every Sunday from 11 to 1 p.m. on News 95.7 FM, News 91.9 FM and News 88.9 FM.



Something Noble

William Kowalski

Orca Rapid Reads, March 2012, \$9.95 ISBN: 9781459800137, Also available as an e-book

Linda is a young, hardworking single mom struggling to get by. When she learns that her son Dre needs a kidney transplant, her family's precarious financial situation takes a turn for the worst. Then she discovers that the only one who can help Dre is his half-brother LeVon, a selfish, drug-dealing gangbanger. Somehow Linda must get through to LeVon in order to save her son. Though terrified of LeVon and the world he lives in, Linda knows she must meet him on his own turf if she is to have any hope of success.

William Kowalski is the award-winning author of the international bestseller *Eddie's Bastard*. His previous titles in the Orca Rapid Reads series of fiction and non-fiction for adults are *The Barrio Kings* and *The Way it Works*. He teaches communications skills to adult learners at the Nova Scotia Community College.

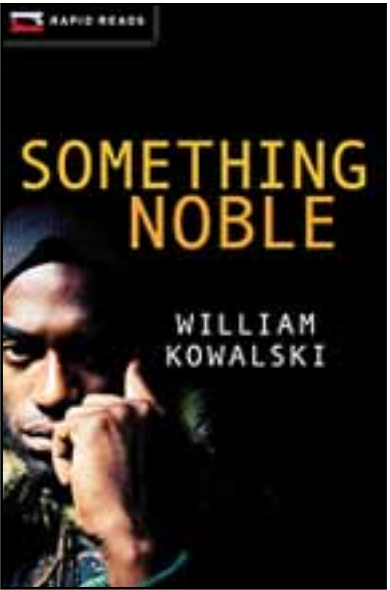
Baby Play

Carol McDougall and Shanda LaRamee-Jones

Nimbus, May 2012, \$8.95, ISBN: 978-155109-902-6

Babies will love listening to the bouncy rhythm and rhyme of the text and looking at the bright, bold photos. This is the perfect board book for new parents, baby programs, and baby shower gifts. Extra information for parents is available through the web link provided on the book's cover. This is the first in the Baby Steps series, where each book will focus on a key developmental stage in baby's first year.

Carol McDougall received the Mayor's Award for Cultural Achievement and the Progress Women of Excellence Award for her work in early literacy. She is director of the Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program. Shanda LaRamee-Jones is the provincial coordinator for the program.



Haunted Girl

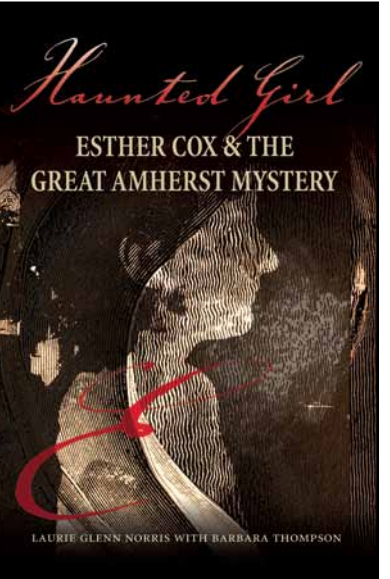
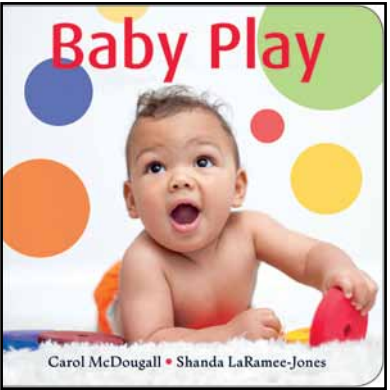
Esther Cox and the Great Amherst Mystery

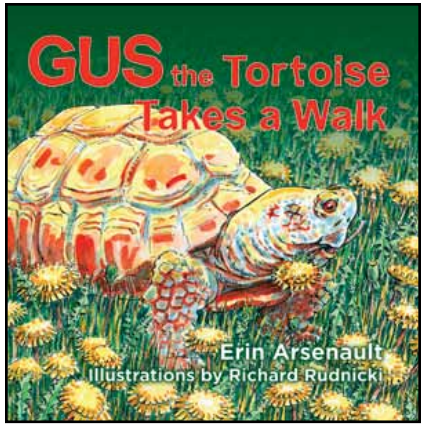
Laurie Glenn Norris with Barbara Thompson

Nimbus, May 2012, \$17.95, ISBN: 978-155109-907-1, e-book 978-155109-913-2

In 1878, 18-year-old Esther Cox arrived in Amherst, Nova Scotia, to live with her sister's family. Soon the house was plagued with unexplained occurrences – something (or someone) knocked on walls, hid household items, moved furniture around, and set fires. Esther suffered mysterious fevers, prodding and stabbing. After she was charged with robbery and spent a month in jail, the haunting ceased. Was Esther the victim of paranormal powers or the troubled mind behind a series of elaborate hoaxes? In its day, Esther's story was a media sensation.

Laurie Glenn Norris and Barbara Thompson examine the mystery at the heart of the Esther Cox legend, with new attention paid to Esther's tumultuous childhood following the death of her mother, the opportunities available to women of her time, and the rise of spiritualism and interest in the paranormal in the mid-1880s. The author of *Cumberland County Facts and Folklore* (Nimbus), Laurie Glenn Norris lives in New Brunswick.





Gus the Tortoise Takes a Walk

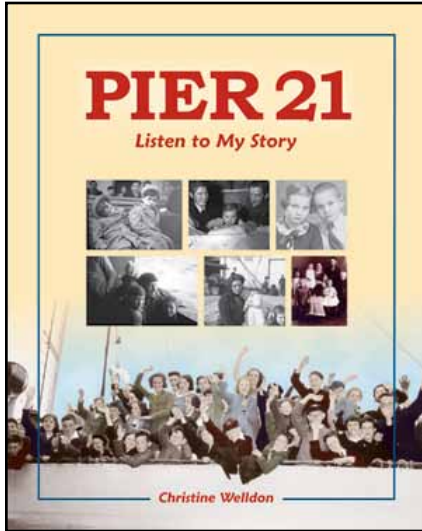
Erin Arsenault

Illustrations by Richard Rudnicki

Nimbus, May 2012, \$18.95, ISBN: 978-155109-906-4

Gus is the 90-year-old tortoise residing in the Museum of Natural History in Halifax. And this story is based on true events, when Gus really did “run away.” Gus is getting a new home. But the box with Gus in it gets left outside just long enough for Gus to wander away. He strolls along Spring Garden Road, taking in the sights while Elliott frantically searches for him. Gus discovers a quiet, shady corner of the Public Gardens and makes himself comfortable. Elliott goes to the Gardens to make a wish in the fountain that he’ll find Gus – and it comes true.

Erin Arsenault suggested this book at the 2008 Word on the Street Pitch the Publisher event. Artist Richard Rudnicki is the award-winning illustrator of *A Christmas Dollhouse*, *I Spy a Bunny*, and *Gracie the Public Gardens Duck*.



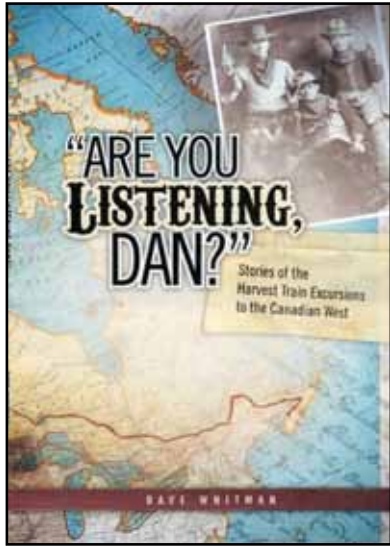
Pier 21: Listen to My Story

Christine Welldon

Nimbus, June 2012, \$15.95 ISBN: 978-155109-909-5

Between 1928 and 1971, about 1.5 million people passed through Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In this pictorial, fact-filled book for young readers, Christine Welldon shares the true stories of nine children who remember their voyages over and their first experiences in a new place. With more than 40 photos, a glossary, timeline, and sidebar features on the pier itself and the home countries of these who passed through it, the book is an introduction for children to this key landmark in Canada’s immigration history.

Christine Welldon is the author of *Molly Kool: Captain of the Atlantic*, *The Children of Africville*, and *The Children of the Titanic*.



“Are You Listening, Dan?”

Stories of the Harvest Train Excursions to the Canadian West

Dave Whitman

Bailey Chase Books, 2012, www.davewhitman.ca

Between 1890 and 1930, before the introduction of mechanized combine threshers, thousands of men travelled by train to the Prairies to work for three or four weeks each year on the wheat harvest. It was backbreaking and living conditions were often deplorable, even on the train. A harvester would earn between \$1.75 and \$2.25 for a 12-hour day, while a tresher was paid between \$2 and \$3.25 a day. Dave Whitman always enjoyed hearing his dad’s, John Whitman, stories of the Canadian West and the Northland. They are chronicled here along with stories from other Annapolis Valley men who went west to help with the annual harvest. They were part of Canadian history.

Dave Whitman lives on the family farm in Paradise, Annapolis County, with his wife Paulette. A retired teacher, he operates Bailey Chase Books with Paulette and they have published several books of local history.

Report from the field:

Alice in Swaziland

Gwen Davies

In September 2011 I take an office in the Roy Building, last of the affordable and beautiful buildings in downtown Halifax. In the washroom I meet Joan, former student, as Crossroads International is about to close its eastern office across the hall. Joan is the director. I’ve always wanted to volunteer with Crossroads. Joan had an idea about sending someone to collect stories from projects.

February 16, 2012, I step off today’s flight to Manzini, Swaziland’s only airport, into blinding sun. It’s 30°C. Happily, no one dies in the taxi ride to Madonsa Guest House.

By end of day I’ve settled into Bumi’s (spelled Mphumie) aging villa, drunk tap water and survived, bought a SIM card so I could use my one communication tool which is texting on my borrowed cell, and retrieved the bank card I left earlier in the bank machine. The security guard – there is one at every bank machine and every business – had tucked it into the security book.

My feet get to know the broken sidewalks. I sweat through an outfit a day but walking feels necessary. “Hello” from me evokes a transformative smile from almost anyone I meet, any age. The George Hotel, en route to the programs in town, serves lattés.

Texting an efficient business letter, I set up meetings to interview volunteers, who will introduce me to staff at FLAS (Family Life Association of Swaziland) and SWAGAA (Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse). I find a stationery



Views from my room at the Madonsa Guest House



The courtyard at the Madonsa Guest House



Walking to town

store to stock up on pens and note pads.

Bumi feeds me like I am a family of three, frozen cauliflower and broccoli; a tomato, onion and garlic sauce from sweet, ripe tomatoes; rice and meat. Breakfast is boxed cereal followed by eggs any style, bacon and toast. I ask for whole wheat bread. Fat-Boy’s Pizza in the marble mall at the far end of town is a 40-minute walk, laptop in backpack (“You’re going to *walk*?!”) but it has free, reliable high-speed if you eat guess what for lunch. My education has begun.

After seven, you stay home or take a taxi. Our villa, like everyone’s house in town, has a fence topped with looped razor wire.

After 13 years the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill has just passed parliament, with endless work from SWAGAA – senate and royal assent to go. SWAGAA’s staff includes lawyers, who add legal support to the counselling for women and connection with every kind of care.

SWAGAA also focuses on empowering children, particularly girls. Violence against women is mostly physical. Toward children, mostly sexual. HIV/AIDS is the highest in the world; 50 percent of the population is under 18. Child-headed households need food, shoes for winter and protection from rape. Some communities are so isolated there is no phone to call for help. The school program Girls Empowerment addresses all of that, taking girls from being too shy



Girls empowerment clubs



Emly in the House on Fire, Gone Rural.



The market, downtown Manzini.

to speak, who believe by 14 they will be married and pregnant, to feeling “big alive,” able to imagine university.

FLAS sends mobile health units to every corner of the country and works intensively with teens. “The work is hard and the results are joy,” head of youth programming says. FLAS is recovering from having to compete with a flood of foreign aid organizations that have no local networks and little expertise, but nonetheless sopped up money when HIV/AIDS was popular to fund. (Aid money is now moving to climate change.) The volunteers I meet from Crossroads bring their professionalism, skills in communications and evaluation, their ease and passion, and the eyes of the Western world to this tiny kingdom. The king takes so much of the money the IMF is withdrawing support.

A volunteer from Australia takes me aside. You can’t go down the path of despair, he says. It renders you useless. I visit a rural program, boMake, and its profit-making parent Gone Rural. GR sells the crafts of more than 700 women from across the country. When you bring in income and food, you call the shots, staff says. The women earn above the poverty line. A portion of their income helps boMake drill wells, supply school fees, teach workshops. “If Gone Rural wasn’t here,” some of them tell me, “we don’t think we would still be living.”

My evening lullaby is a screeching bird like something from *The Hobbit*, crickets, the guard dogs barking up and down the street and a chorus of frogs. Manzini is half way up the mountains of this beautiful country. University students are on strike because no one has given them their food and



housing allowance. Though the country is considered lower-middle income, 70 percent live below the poverty line, largely outside cities. The newspaper reports how many cows a bride’s family offers in negotiating a marriage.

Over the middle weekend, I go to a big-game park for endangered species. Transport leaves when it’s full, from the bus rank – a square shoe-horned with busses and kombis (aged Toyota vans) beeping horns and hollering destinations. At Mkhaya giraffes eat from the tops of trees while termites build giant nests around the bottoms, elephants bathe, a malachite kingfisher electrifies a branch over a small lake, wildebeests whip up their tails and run, and I sleep in a thatched stone hut lit by lanterns.

On the way home I make a friend, Emly, who has survived four years of treatment for the multiple-drug-resistant TB that killed her parents. We take a kombi to the world-class restaurant beside Gone Rural for lunch the next Saturday. I accompany Emly to court to fight for support for her son’s school fees. She loses, but I’ve sat outside the courtroom waiting and she appreciates the support. She goes to work at ShopRite and I go to weep quietly over a latté at The George. We promise to write. Her brother has an address I can use.

As the airline stewards walk down the aisles spraying insecticide against malaria mosquitoes, I promise to go back to my office at the Roy and tell the stories. ■

Gwen Davies writes and teaches fiction, and often works as a consultant in clear language and design. She offers writing workshops through various institutions and non-profit organizations, and private workshops.

E-books

Arazi Crossing
Book One: Quinn’s Evolution
Carolyn Hockley
www.smashwords.com, March 2012, \$2.99

The Royals are dying and Evil is poised to conquer the Earth. Five teens receive the same gift at the same time. Travelling across time, they are brought together. Each has a quest to fulfill to become a Royal, an Ace, a sorcerer for Good, watching over and protecting humankind. Quinn, April, Maya, Juina and Janus will have to work together to complete their quests to evolve into the next Royals of Arazi Crossing.

Carolyn Hockley lives in Cole Harbour and is the founder and executive director of the Young Writers’ Society of Nova Scotia, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing guidance and resources to young people.

Nephilim, The Remembering
Kirk Allen Kreitzer
iUniverse, November 2011, e-book \$3.99 ISBN: 978-1-46203-392-8

Nephilim, The Remembering will take you on a global ride of religious extremism, angelic intervention and demonic possession. Curtis Papp, a member of the Canadian Air Force, is in Israel for a Canadian/Israeli joint training exercise. An overwhelming desire to visit Kiriath Arba (Hebron), thrusts him 3,300 years into the past to the massacre of its Nephilim citizenry (half angel/half human hybrids of the Old Testament). He discovers he has Nephilim ancestry and divine DNA and must confront Krájcár, a clandestine religion created by Attila the Hun in the fifth century, headed by Gergő Mátyás, a direct descendant of Attila, whose goal is to rid the world of the Nephilim.

Kirk Allen Kreitzer and his family are currently stationed at 12 Wing Shearwater. Kirk’s currently writing the second book of his series *Nephilim, The Awakening*.

Children of the Poor Clares
Mavis Arnold and Heather Laskey
Trafford Publishing, February 2012, \$6, ISBN: 978-1-4669-0903-8

The original ground-breaking 1985 edition of *Children of the Poor Clares* by Heather Laskey was the first book to expose the horrendous abuse of the thousands of children placed in church care in Ireland’s state-funded Industrial Schools, a vast apparatus of incarceration for children whose only crime was poverty. This revised, updated edition gives chilling details of revelations that have since become public and of the state’s ultimate responsibility for what took place.

Co-author Heather Laskey worked as a journalist in Ireland and Canada. Her last book was the award-winning *Night Voices: Heard in the Shadow of Hitler and Stalin* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

Freelance business basics

Sandra Phinney

Sometimes we get caught up looking for markets, sending queries, doing research and interviews or our brains are buried so deep in the writing process that we fail to take care of basic business housekeeping items. The result can be everything from being disorganized and overwhelmed, to missing opportunities that can actually improve our profit margin.

Here are a few things that might uncomplicate your freelance life:

1. Create a query/client tracker. If one of your goals is to send a lot of queries or contact potential clients (and therefore round up new work), you need to keep track of both your efforts and the results. Otherwise, you can forget what you've put "out there" and lose track of outcomes. A query tracker doesn't have to be complicated. I have a simple six-column chart in Word. Columns include: Date; Name of client or magazine; Topic/Request; Follow up; Result; and Notes. Reviewing and updating this once a week helps me keep on top of what's going on, and reminds me what to do next.

2. Create an invoice tracker. I use an Excel spreadsheet so I can see at a glance my income to date, as well as what's owed to me. The column headers I use are: Client (name of magazine, newspaper, e-zine or corporate client); Assignment (story topic + word count or project); Projected invoice/amt.; Actual invoice amt./date sent; Invoice date/paid; and Accounts receivable. At any given time I know what my projected income is for the year, what I've invoiced for and when, and when I've been paid. It's also easy to see what's owing and overdue.

3. Create a to-do list. Basically I have two columns: Deadlines (I note story topic, word count and date due) and To Do, which is for everything else I should be doing. You can do this with a Word doc and simply delete what you've done and add what needs to be done on a regular basis.

I like to have a hard copy so I use a three-column sheet with lines, cross out or add items by hand, and cart the list around in my day book. This means I have to print a new to-do page every once in awhile and fill it out (being sure to carry over deadlines and unfinished to-do stuff), but that's how I like to operate. It matters not what method you use. What's important is to have things written down and not in your head. We all need road maps.

4. Create a work-flow schedule. This isn't complicated or time consuming. I buy a desk blotter with big squares and dates (one page for each month). You can use any big calendar, make your own, or use an online organizer. Then it's a matter of figuring out when you are actually going to do XYZ in order to (a) meet your deadlines and (b) keep your sanity intact. If I get slack doing this, I end up going around in circles and my blood pressure jumps over the moon. Not a pretty sight and hard on the psyche.

5. Back up, back up, back up. You can buy external harddrives to back up your files. Buy two. Just do it. Back up often. If you don't, you'll be sorry.

There now. Feel better? I will, as soon as I update my to-do list, figure out who owes me money, and re-jig my work-flow calendar. Might even have time to take a nap, instead of going around in circles.

Now here's some rosier, richer news. Once a year Access Copyright and Public Lending Rights deposit money into our bank accounts. But only if

we're registred with them and do what we're supposed to do at the right time.

Access Copyright (www.accesscopyright.ca) If you are a published writer and/or photographer (and have both been paid for said work and have not sold all rights to your work) then you are eligible to receive a creators "payback" cheque every year in November. Schools, universities, libraries and other institutions pay for the right to photocopy our work. Access Copyright (AC) collects the money and divides it among the "creators" once a year. You have to register with AC (free membership), then fill out the application form that documents what you've published. Then you update your file once a year. Once registered with AC, every member gets a base rate, just for being a published member. In addition to that, your "payback" increases according to how much you've had published. The more prolific you are, the fatter your cheque will be, as a portion of your cheque is based on quantity of published works.

Public Lending Rights (www.plr-dpp.ca) If you have written one or more books, you can register with PLR. Again, once a year you'll get a cheque. It's based on the number of books you've written and how many libraries are carrying your books across the country, and they figure that out, so you don't have to. Some books don't qualify, e.g. cookbooks, guide books. ■

Sandra Phinney pens stories from her perch on the Tusket River in Yarmouth County. www.sandraphinney.com

The pleasures of writing a series

Jessica Scott Kerrin

Why a series?

Do you easily discover dozens of subplots spinning off from the main storyline you're working on? Do your secondary characters threaten to overtake your protagonist? Is there an overarching theme that could tie more than one book together? Do you have difficulty ending your story because of unresolved conflict? Then you might be a series writer.

Reasons for writing a series abound. Authors can spend more time with their favourite characters. They can explore a particular theme in a deep and sustained way. In some cases, a series can be easier to write: by book number two, the author has already undertaken much of the background research as well as established the setting, tone, cast of characters, narrator and point of view.

Parents and librarians support series because they are a proven way to engage children in reading. If the child has enjoyed one book, then it doesn't take much convincing that she or he would enjoy the next. In practical terms, a young reader cannot be expected to attempt a 1,000-page novel; however, breaking the work up into shorter volumes makes that task less daunting.

Publishers like series as well. If the reader loves a series, that reader will be more likely to buy the whole backlist and then eagerly await the next installment. Subsequent books are launched with the guarantee of a pre-existing audience, which translates into a marketing advantage.



Types of series

A series can be a duet, a trilogy or an open-ended number of books, as long as there is some element that ties them together. Essentially, there are three types: serials, sequels/prequels, and spinoffs.

A serial follows the main character through different unconnected stories. Each book is self-contained and could be read as a stand-alone novel without a lot of details from the other volumes.

When I developed my first series, *Martin Bridge*, I thought of it as a mosaic or giant puzzle. Each story was written by giving my main character various challenges, then exploring how he would react: peer pressure by a boys' troop, the theft of a brand-new bike, a science fair partner who didn't do his share of

the work, outgrowing a superhero, the death of a neighbour's pet.

In later books, I made references to earlier adventures to encourage readers to check out previous books. However, going back wasn't necessary to understanding the plot at hand. The advantage of this tactic is that my characters did not outgrow their readers. Instead, readers were likely ready to move on to a more advanced reading level after completing the series.

I ended each serial installment in the same way as one would approach ending a stand-alone work. With serials, there is hardly anything left to resolve, perhaps only a thread or two left dangling, but certainly no cliff hangers. Serials are often seen in the genres of mystery, suspense and adventure.

Sequels/prequels contain one continuing story over a finite number of volumes. While each volume has a beginning, middle, climax and denouement, the main conflict is introduced in the first volume, and then the larger plot arcs over the entire series, coming to an end in the final installment: one story told over many books.

Prequels are the opposite of sequels; these are stories that happen before the current action. With this type of series, characters age and develop over time, and information is carried forward in a linear fashion. As such, the reader needs to tackle the volumes in sequence.

The most challenging aspect of sequels/prequels is to craft an ending for each book that satisfies but still urges the reader to continue with the next volume. Here, the writer will often leave some questions unanswered, some conflict unresolved. It is in the final volume that the writer will want to wrap up all of the threads, subplots and conflicts that were created throughout the series. Typical genres for sequels/prequels include science fiction, fantasy and historical fiction.

The most common strategy for authors of spinoffs is to take a secondary character from the first book and create a whole new plot for additional stories. While the main character in the first volume may make a cameo appearance, his or her role is minor in later installments as the secondary character moves to the lead and expands readership by appealing to different audiences.

In my new spinoff trilogy (*The Lobster Chronicles*), each volume covers the same event – the accidental capture of a giant lobster – but has been written from a different child’s point of view:

the son of a lobster fisherman, the son of the local lobster cannery owner, and the grandson of a retired fisherman living in a seniors’ residence. The protagonist in one installment becomes an antagonist in another, thus highlighting opposing perspectives that sustain conflict over the three volumes.

In addition to connecting through characters, spinoffs can also share setting or even a concept/theme. Spinoffs are most common in the romance genre.

Pitfalls to avoid

No matter which series type, writing one presents the same challenges involved in completing a stand-alone work, but with additional issues to consider. For example, the first book in a successful series must be told with the same regard for tension and story arc as any stand-alone novel. However, the writer now needs to figure out how to sustain the conflict over multiple volumes while avoiding formulaic solutions.

Sustaining conflict is most easily achieved by developing depth in the cast of characters, essentially a group that the reader wouldn’t mind spending significantly more time with compared to a stand-alone novel. But even that can be a challenge: if the writer has chosen the serial format, he or she will not be able to significantly change the characters over time, making it difficult to keep them interesting book after book.

Unfortunately, some writers might be tempted to give them mannerisms that, over numerous volumes, turn them into caricatures. Instead, good serial writers must work hard to develop complex and at times contradictory characters, often with tragic flaws, who mirror

real people.

I found that this could be achieved by paying attention to the details embedded in nightly dinner conversations that my family members had about their peers as I developed the *Martin Bridge* cast: a friendly but pathological fibber, a lonely smart-aleck, an ambitious but talentless musician.

If the writer has chosen the sequel/prequel format, which will allow the characters to age and grow over time, the writer should avoid having them repeat the same blunders. To do so, makes for a tedious study, to the point where the reader no longer sympathizes with the protagonist who seems incapable of learning from mistakes. In my case, I wrote 18 stories (two to three stories per book) for the *Martin Bridge* series, each one complete with its own story arc. Midway through the series, I realized that there could only be so many fights for Martin to have with his friends before my readers might begin to think that Martin needs to find new friends.

Building and sustaining suspense can be a challenge when developing a sequel/prequel or a serial. This is particularly true if the author has placed the protagonist in danger. The reader will know that there are more books to come, so the threat isn’t all that real. A writer will find it helpful to plan the entire story ahead of time so that she or he can break it down into volumes that both start and end with a bang.

There is another challenge with sequels/prequels: the writer should not assume that the reader will be familiar with previous volumes. The reader will still need to be hooked by the first line, then given just enough detail to carry him or her through its turning points, climax and denouement. How much

detail? A good guideline for me is to slip details in as a natural part of dialogue or narrative. Like a stand-alone novel, too much back story will bore loyal readers who have faithfully read previous volumes.

One more point about detail – consistency can be difficult over many drafts, mostly because it can take years to complete a series. However, fast readers may go at a body of work in a condensed period of time, making any inconsistencies embarrassingly obvious.

I have found it helpful to develop a guidebook, which includes details about the characters, setting, subplots and timeline. I also include visual references (photos, sketches, maps, calendar). Once developed, this guide can be revised and updated as my series evolves. I also share parts of the guidebook with my editor and illustrator so that we are all on the same page.

Unless a publisher has contracted a writer for a series, it is best to write that first installment as if it were a stand-alone work, which means crafting a successful ending. Of course, for spinoffs and serials, this is much easier than it would be for sequels/prequels. Publishers aren’t necessarily going to commit to purchasing a series by an unproven author. The second installment will only see the light of day if the first book proves itself in the market. In my case, my publisher offered me a two-book contract that grew to eight once the first volumes did well in sales.

I would also urge writers to pay careful attention to the first title in their series. They will likely want to use it as a springboard for subsequent titles that link together in some manner. It may be helpful to develop a list of potential future

titles in the guidebook I mentioned earlier before settling on a title for the first book.

The empty nest syndrome can be a challenge for series writers. It certainly was for me. After spending so much time in the company of Martin Bridge, it was hard to say goodbye, let alone think of creating new characters. But there came a day when Martin holed up in his tree fort with his buddies for good, and I was left with a blank sheet of paper. Unable to completely let go, I took one of the Martin Bridge characters – a cranky and interfering elderly aunt named Laverne Bridge – and had her turn up in my new trilogy, same as ever, but in a whole new setting.

Lastly, writing a series presents unique time challenges. While the first book is often written with personal enthusiasm over a luxurious period of time, the second book will be subject to market-driven pressures. This means meeting regular deadlines, hooking more readers and increasing sales.

Also, due to the extended time frame required for series writing, an author will likely experience a personnel change at her or his publishing house: an art director, an editor, a publicist, even the publisher may move on to other opportunities. Ongoing staff changes necessitate extra diligence on the author’s part to ensure consistency in every aspect of the series.

Final thoughts

Writing a series has many benefits, although it might be off-putting for authors who dislike the extensive planning required to produce multiple volumes. Still, it’s not all mapping and timelines. What I most enjoy about series writing is inserting little spontaneous details

that I can revisit in subsequent stories to form the basis for new plot lines: a bus driver turns up later to repair an old lawnmower; a girl who can climb rope upstages a bully in a subsequent volume; a camper who will eat anything on a dare shows up to save the day when Martin misses a field trip to the dinosaur museum. These delightful and, at times, accidental discoveries, along with a constellation of compelling characters, counterbalance the amount of tedious planning that series writing demands. They are also key to sustaining readers over multiple volumes. After all, isn’t life a web of loosely connected stories? ■

This article was originally published in the Summer 2011 issue of The Canadian Children’s Book Centre News. Back issues of the publication can be found on the Centre’s website – www.bookcentre.ca.

Jessica Scott Kerrin is the author of Martin Bridge, an eight-book serial of short stories for 7-to-10-year-olds published by Kids Can Press that has sold over 130,000 copies in Canada, the U.S. and Europe and garnered numerous awards along the way. She is currently working on a new trilogy spinoff – The Lobster Chronicles – based on the perspective of three boys living in a coastal community called Lower Narrow Spit, where a local fisherman has accidentally captured a giant lobster. Kids Can Press has recently released Lower the Trap the first volume in the series. Jessica’s website is <http://jessicascottkerrin.wordpress.com/>

Who’s doing what

■ **Bylines seen:** Janet Hull’s essay “Snowbird Misses Winter” appeared in the February 26 *NovaScotian*, a *Chronicle Herald* Sunday supplement. Two short stories by **Bretton Loney** will appear in the inaugural edition of *Between the Lines – The Canadian Journal of Hockey Literature* and one will be in *2011 Canadian Tales of the Mysterious*, an anthology from Red Tuque Books. **Wanda Campbell**’s short story “The Day Gordie Howe came to Halton Hills” will also be in the first issue of *Between the Lines – The Canadian Journal of Hockey Literature*; *Wascana Review* published her article “You Have to Play: The Role of Textbooks in Creative Writing Pedagogy.” “The Kindest Cut” by **Lezlie Lowe** lets you sharpen your knife skills and learn what knives you need in the kitchen in *Eastcoast Living*. **Jon Tatttrie**’s piece “Meet the real Edward Cornwallis” in the *Chronicle Herald* of March 11 earned him an interview on Rick Howe’s show on News 95.7. Jon’s researching and writing a biography of Cornwallis, the founder of Halifax, to be published by Pottersfield Press next year. **Heddy Johannesen** is in the upcoming *Saltlines* anthology and will be published in *Essential Herbs* magazine this summer. Look for two poems by **Deirdre Dwyer** in *The Antigonish Review*. **Sarah Gignac**’s short story, “My Body’s Rorschach,” was published in *Pilot 9* – a Toronto-based periodical with a mandate to print primarily new storytellers, poets and artists from Canada and beyond (www.thepilotproject.ca).

■ Halifax poet laureate **Tanya Davis** was featured in the March issue of *Halifax Magazine* in a story by Shannon Webb Campbell.

■ **Joanne Light** will appear at Toronto’s Art Bar Poetry Series on May 29.

■ **Jo Treggiari** (*Ashes, Ashes*) and **Vicki Grant** (*Betsy Wickwire’s Dirty Secret*) were nominated for the Saskatchewan Snow Willow Award, voted for by Saskatchewan kids.



■ **Josh MacDonald**’s award-winning horror film *The Corridor* is now in on demand release from IFC Midnight and is available in Canada via iTunes, Sony, Xbox, Google, Bell VOD, Cogeco, MTS, Rogers, SaskTel, Shaw VOD, Telus, VCC, and Videotron. Among *The Corridor*’s prizes is an AMC/Dell Next Wave Award for Best Screenplay from influential genre taste-maker Fantastic Fest in Austin, Texas.

■ Each year, the American Horticultural Society recognizes outstanding gardening books published in North America with its annual Book Award. This year’s five recipients, selected from books published in 2011, includes *The Year Round Vegetable Gardener* by **Niki Jabbour** (Story Publishing). The three judges had substantial praise for the book: “Among the many books on growing edibles flooding the market lately, this book stood out in all ways. ... The design deserves special commendation because it is so user-friendly yet so packed with information. ... It’s so much information, so clearly presented, and so very inspiring!”

■ **Sara Jewell** is a finalist for the 2011 Atlantic Journalism Awards being held in Fredericton on May 5. Her magazine article, “The Circle of Life,” was published in the September/October 2011 issue of *Saltscapes*. It was her sixth article for *Saltscapes* and this is her first nomination for an AJA. Since June 2011, Sara has been working at her local community newspaper, *The Oxford Journal*. She was hired part-time for ad design and classifieds but quickly wangled two bi-weekly writing assignments, a profile feature called “In Conversation With ...” and a column called “Field Notes.” Check out her writing at www.fieldnotescumberland.blogspot.com

■ Also up for an Atlantic Journalism Award in the magazine article category is **Carol Moreira** for “Halifax, NS – A Place to Think” published in *Nova Scotia Open to the World* and **Jon Tatttrie** for “Justice Delayed” in *Halifax Magazine*.

■ **Shandi Mitchell** recently won the \$20,000 Kobzar Literary Award, sponsored by the Shevchenko Foundation for *Under This Unbroken Sky* (Penguin). The award recognizes outstanding contributions to Canadian literary arts by authors who develop a Ukrainian Canadian theme with literary merit in one of several genres: literary non-fiction, fiction, poetry, young readers’ literature, plays, screenplays and musicals. The novel, which has sold in nine countries, begins in the 1930s and follows a Ukrainian family on the Prairies. Shandi wrote on her website: “I wasn’t prepared for the emotional and overwhelming response to the book. Nor the outpouring of stories that were gifted to me. And I was again reminded how privileged I am in Canada to have the freedom to write. And how much I take it for granted. As precious as the prize is, I will always remember the people who approached me to share the hurts and pain and pride of a community whose stories haven’t been heard. Along with the award, I received a bronze statue by internationally renowned artist Leo Mol, who died in 2009 at the age of 92. It is a statue of a Kobzar. It is an exquisite work and you can almost hear the music as he leans into his instrument. Kobzars were minstrel storytellers. In the 1930s, all the Ukrainian Kobzars were invited to a music festival and executed. *Kobzar* was the title of Ukraine’s most famous poet, Taras Shevchenko’s, first collection. Writing from exile, he was never able to return to his beloved Ukraine.”

■ **Sylvia Hamilton**, a filmmaker, writer and educator known for documentaries exploring the history and experiences of African-Canadians, received a Wave Award at the second annual conference for women in film, television and new media.

■ **Sue Goyette** is on the Pat Lowther Award Shortlist of six for her latest poetry collection *outskirts* (Brick Books). The award is given for a book of poetry by a Canadian woman published in the preceding year, and is in memory of the late Pat Lowther, whose career was cut short by her untimely death in 1975. The award carries a \$1,000 prize.

■ The summer 2012 issue of *Prairie Fire* magazine will feature award-winning works from **Sue Goyette** and **Lorri Neilsen Glenn**. Sue won first prize in the 2011 Banff Centre Bliss Carman Poetry Award writing contest for her poem “fashion,” and Lorri won first prize in the 2011 Creative Non-Fiction writing contest for her piece “Maxime’s.”



■ From Memory to Page a one-day WFNS memoir and poetry course held in March at Windhorse Farm, New Germany, attracted (left to right) Blanca Baquero, **Brian Braganza**, instructor **Alison Smith**, **Lesley Hartman**, **Julie Vandervoort**, **Lloyd Williams**, and **Pamela Segger**.



■ Word on the Street Halifax held a super-successful, super-fun Spelling Bee fundraiser in March. The WFNS Team of Super Spellers were (left to right) **Dave Howlett**, Team Captain **Nate Crawford** (who contributed in no way other than copping this Angelina Jolie-inspired pose and offering a modicum of moral support), **Stephanie Domet**, and **Susan Drain**. In a stunning act of betrayal/exemplary demonstration of neutrality, WFNS board VP **Ryan Turner**, serving as word pronouncer, toppled our team with staphylococcus (the word, not the infection). Though we made it to round two, the night was won by the Nova Scotia Department of Education – congrats to their team and to WOTS for a terrific event.

■ **Angela Mombourquette** won a Canadian Community Newspaper Award in April. She received the George Cadogan Memorial Outstanding Columnist Award for three pieces that appeared in the *Halifax-HRM West Community Herald*, published by the *Chronicle Herald*. Angela has written nearly 250 “Don’t get me started” columns since 2007. Over 340 community newspapers submitted about 2,500 entries in more than 70 categories from work published last year.

■ *Small Gifts* by **Sandra Barry** is a new chapbook offering from Joe Heron Press – a poetic exploration of the gifts she’s received, exploring the actual objects and what they meant/mean to her years after the giving. She’s still working on the main manuscript, but out of it came this chapbook of 14 short poems printed in a hand-sewn limited edition of 90 copies. To purchase contact slbarry@ns.sympatico.ca.

■ **Alison DeLory** recently launched her children’s chapter book *Lunar Lifter* (Bryler Publications) at the Keshen Goodman Library, Halifax.

■ **Susan Mersereau** was first runner up in *Prism International’s* Short Fiction Contest 2012 for “The Lights on Canada Day.” “The Man Who Fell in Love with his Cello” by **Heather Jessup** was also on the shortlist of 10 gleaned from more than 300 entries.

WFNS Annual General Meeting – June 2

Please consider attending our “value added” AGM this year, which will be held on Saturday, June 2, beginning promptly at noon. In addition to the business of the day, we will as always be presenting our **2012 Mentorship Program readings** – you’ll hear excerpts from the work of Carmelita Boivin-Cole, Ella Silver, Ian MacLeod, Vincent MacIlivray, and Meaghan Campbell. Also, be the very first to hear the **shortlist for the Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award, the Atlantic Poetry Prize, and the Evelyn Richardson Memorial Literary Prize for Non-Fiction**, and what events and appearances are ahead in 2012 for the nominated authors. Lastly, **we will be unveiling the latest upgrades to our website** – www.writers.ns.ca. And did we mention there will be lots of delicious food? Save the date!



■ Another Scribbler published! **Daphne Greer** (second from right) was joined by Graham Bullock, Lisa Harrington, **Jo Ann Yhard**, Jennifer Thorne, and Joanna Butler – all members of the now legendary writers’ group – at the launch of *Maxed Out*, Daphne’s new Orca Currents book, here at WFNS.



■ Coast-to-coast events were held in March in honour of poet Irving Layton’s centenary year. Halifax’s celebratory evening, organized by **Andy Wainwright** and **Brian Bartlett**, featured favorite Layton works read by a cross-section of Nova Scotia poets: left to right Andy Wainwright, Phaniel Antwi, Mark Huculak, Nanci Lee, Liane Heller, John Goode, Travis Mason, **Alice Burdick**, Michael Pacey, **Carole Langille**, David Rimmington, **Nate Crawford**, and Brian Bartlett (photo Karen Estabrooks Gordon).