



Spring
2018

Canadian Authors Association
National Capital Region

Byline

Vol 35:3 ISSN 1929-6193

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Finding Our Voice

BY ARLENE SMITH

IF THERE'S A theme for our events over the next few months, I'd say that "Finding Our Voice" is it. Our topics for the spring and into the summer revolve around finding voice in plays, poetry, dialogue and song. I recently re-watched this video featuring Neil Gaiman, and it reminded me of the groundwork we need to do to find voice. Every day, putting word after word, to find voice.

[Neil Gaiman- The Nerdist Podcast](#)

PLAYWRITING

Writing for the spoken word hones dialogue techniques for other writing. The practice of building the stage in your mind and visualizing character movements teaches the writer what needs to be portrayed through words and what can be portrayed through other means. Even if you never plan on writing a play, Laurie Fyffe's meeting presentation on Tuesday, [March 13](#) will help you with your writer craft.

POETRY

On Tuesday, [April 10](#), JC Sulzenko will challenge us to find our own poetic voice by studying that of Rupi Kaur. At this interactive meeting JC will study selections from Kaur's work and lead us in crafting a poem of our own.

continued on page 2

Registration now open for the
Canadian Writers' Summit

June 14 to 17, 2018

Harbourfront Centre, Toronto

<http://www.canadianwriterssummit.com/>

CWS / **SCE**
canadian writers' summit / sommet canadien des écrivains

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DIALOGUE

Tim Wynne-Jones tells us that scenework brings the reader closest to the action." On Saturday, [April 21](#), he will talk about dialogue, scene and summary as a way to really know our characters. The mechanics of dialogue helps us to find our voice.

SONG


One of the best ways to find voice is through music. On Tuesday, June 12, Phill Jenkins will lead us in an rollicking evening of story and song. We will find our voices in more than one way!

NCWC

On Tuesday, [May 8](#) we hear the voices of the finalists of the National Capital Writing Contest read their short stories and poems. Please join us to hear the variety of work from talented writers.

CANADIAN WRITERS' SUMMIT

And, of course, one of the best ways to develop as a writer and find your voice is by interacting with other writers from across the country. This year CAA is one of the cohort of organizations co-hosting the super-conference at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto from [June 14 to 17](#).

Whether through poetry, plays, the spoken word or interactions with other writers, may the voice within you bloom this spring. 



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CanadianAuthorsNCR/>

"Too Long a Winter"

BY LEE ANN SMITH

HONOURABLE MENTION - NCWC 2017

Through the kitchen window
spring air
caresses like fingertips on a cheek.

Spring air
scented with earth
as if soil particles thawed and dissolved into it
made it more complex than what it once was:

Winter air
clear, empty, vast
without content.

The air has melted.
A new season pulses
sap and blood on the rise, while

We sit silently at the kitchen table
frozen like winter air
our conversation polite
without content.

Hearts, like air, can melt.
But has it been too long a winter?

BIO: Lee Ann Smith is the author of two acclaimed non-fiction history books, along with many magazine articles about how to write family history and memoir. In the past few years, she has returned to her love of writing poetry and has also discovered a new passion: taking pictures of beautiful things she finds in her everyday world. She's currently working on her second collection of poetry inspired by these photographs. <http://www.leeannekhardtsmith.com/>

Upcoming Meetings

THE SECOND TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

7:15 P.M.

MCNABB COMMUNITY CENTRE, 180 PERCY STREET

March 13, 2018

THE ARC OF DESIRE: Writing for the Stage

SPEAKER: Laurie Fyffe

What makes a play different from other writing? How do you get characters to tell your story? How does the playwright craft dialogue to serve both characters and plot? It's about wants and desires.

BIO: Laurie Fyffe has a MA in Theatre/Dramaturgy from the University of Ottawa. She teaches script analysis and playwriting and her theatre work has spanned writing, dramaturgy, acting, directing and arts administration. Laurie's plays have been produced by the Tarragon and Factory Theatres, SummerWorks Festival, (Toronto), Theatre Kingston, Ottawa Fringe, and the Blyth Festival. She is Artistic Director of Evolution Theatre, and was Managing Artistic Director of Ottawa StoryTellers.

April 10, 2018

CAN YOU WRITE A POEM LIKE "SUPERSTAR" RUPI KAUR? (Milk and Honey, The Sun and Her Flowers)? Do you want to?

SPEAKER: JC Sulzenko

Join JC Sulzenko, whose first full collection, South Shore Suite...POEMS, came out in November (www.pointpetrepublishing.ca.) She'll highlight aspects of her writing life from writing for children to self-publishing, from writing collaboratively to assuming a pseudonym, then lead an interactive romp through selections from Kaur's work to enable participants to craft a poem there and then or at their 'leisure.' www.jcsulzenko.com

BIO: JC Sulzenko creates poetry and stories for young and adult readers alike. The Ottawa International Writers Festival and the Ottawa Public Library/Ottawa Children's Literature Round Table's Kid Galas have showcased her poetry and books for children. Her poems appear in chapbooks and anthologies and have been broadcast on radio and television. To assist in charitable fund-raising, JC writes impromptu poetry at special events and offers some of her books for sale through not-for-profit groups.

May 8, 2018

National Capital Writing Contest Awards

7:00 p.m.

**Ottawa Public Library, Auditorium,
Main Branch, 120 Metcalfe Street**

The finalists of the 31st annual NCWC will celebrate their achievement and read their work.

June 12, 2018

SUMMER MEETING

SONGS AND STORIES

with Phil Jenkins

Come and enjoy an evening of music and tales with the multi-talented Phil Jenkins, maker and seller of fine English and lyric song.

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

CAA-NCR Workshop

**Dialogue: The Mechanics of ...
with Tim Wynne-Jones
Saturday, April 21, 2018
9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon**

Algonquin College, Woodroffe Campus,
Room J208

\$50 for members of Canadian Authors
Association

\$65 for non-members

Payable by cash, cheque or e-transfer.

Register by sending a message to
NCRAdmin@canadianauthors.org

More information available at:

[CAA-NCR Workshops](#)

Words of Wisdom

Eye-opening Advice from the Pros

BY BARBARA KYLE



WHAT SHOULD A writer write about? The all-too-common answer is: “Write what you know.” John Gardner, in his book *The Art of Fiction*, blows away that dusty dictum, warning that “Nothing is more limiting to the imagination.”

I read that statement by Gardner years ago, when I was learning to write, and it thrilled me. It was a jolt of liberation. It gave me the courage to free my imagination.

So now, after having ten novels published, I give emerging writers this advice: “Write about what fascinates you; just go out and know it.” It’s called research, this getting to know your subject, and whether you glean the information from books, Internet searches, interviews, or walking in the footsteps of your characters, it’s all fuel for your art.

As I write this, it is a holiday in much of North America: Presidents Day in the U.S, and Family Day in Canada, where I live. As a writer, you’re part of the global community of storytellers, and in my eyes that makes you family.

So, in the spirit of Family Day, I offer you my list of 10 indispensable books about writing to liberate your imagination: Barbara Kyle’s Top 10 Picks.

The wisdom in these books ranges from E.M. Forster’s eye-opening maxim about causality being at the heart of plot; to bestselling author Elizabeth George’s down-to-earth tips on craft, spiked with her vivid personal insights on the creative process; to Stephen King’s famous witticism, “The road to hell is paved with adverbs,” to the dissection of story structure that was mind-altering for me at the start of my writing career: Robert McKee’s *Story*.

Give yourself the gift of these inspiring guides. Grow as a writer. Dare to succeed.

To see the list, [click here](#).



BIO: Barbara Kyle is the author of the acclaimed Thornleigh Saga series and thrillers, with sales of over 500,000 books. She has taught writers at the University of Toronto and is a popular presenter at writers’ conferences. As a mentor, she has launched many writers to published success. Her latest book is Page-Turner: Your Path to Writing a Novel that Publishers Want and Readers Buy.

www.BarbaraKyle.com
bkyle@barbarakyle.com

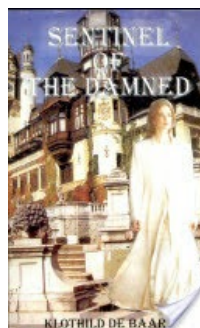
CAA Social Media Expert in Residence

- Members who [sign up](#) receive a weekly tip from the SME—an action they can take right away to improve the way they use social media.
- Participants can also submit questions to the SME in Residence at the email address SME@canadianauthors.org.
- Each month, the SME will conduct a live Q&A session where she will answer questions submitted by members.

Sentinel of the Damned

by Klothild de Baar

(Book Excellence Award Finalist 2016)



An epic tale of an ancient European dynasty whose youngest member, a magnificent daughter, is suddenly and mysteriously reported missing in far-off Canada. A story harking back centuries and told movingly by the family’s eighty-five year-old nanny, as she traces each step of her lost charge, undaunted, to the very bottom of a modern-day hell.

Collaborative Poetry

BY CAROL A. STEPHEN

COLLABORATIVE POETRY IS not new. Both Chinese and Japanese poetry have had collaborative forms for centuries, with two poets or many more writing linked poems, often following strict rules in the content and composition. Poets in the 20th century experimented with collaborations, and it is used in schools as a tool in teaching students to write poetry. Poetry workshops often include the Exquisite Corpse exercise to write group poems. In this exercise, each poet sees only the line of the poet previous to him, so that is all he can respond to. Some surprisingly good poems can result, some funny, some not so much.

Other poets might take a different approach. Poets might write on their own, perhaps choosing a theme, then writing individual poems on the same theme. Or they might instead use call and response, where one poet starts by writing a poem (“the call”), the second poet writing a response to it.)

For the past five years, I’ve been writing collaborative poems with my writing partner, **JC Sulzenko**. What started as a writing exercise at one of our CAA poetry circle meetings gradually changed my writing life.

At first, the poems were the collaboration of three poets, each of us starting a poem, then in turn the others adding a line, until we felt the poem was finished. When the group became a twosome, JC and I continued writing by email.

The poet who started a poem would also set what structure it might take: couplets, quatrains, triplets, or simply one line at a time. We have never set a length for the poem when we start out, but one starts and the other finishes, almost without exception.

It was fun, watching the unexpected twists and turns emerge as two poets’ voices guided the poem first in one direction, then another. It was challenging too, and frustrating at times, especially for the one starting the poem, usually with a firm idea of what the poem was going to be. It also often meant learning to write more concisely, to stay within the constraint of the chosen stanza format. To pay closer attention to the fit of every image, and to allow space in the

poem for the other poet. Each of us might try to lead in a certain direction, but still leave the poem open to change that direction.

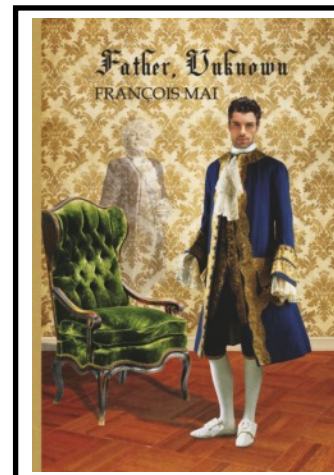
It required compromise and lots of deep breathing, as we each had to shift our sense of what the poem was saying, and what it might say next. By the last line, it was never quite where we thought it would be. But it was something more. There was a third voice emerging, one that blended both poets so well that often we couldn’t remember who had written what without going back to early versions.

Before two years had passed, we had our first chapbook, and a tagline, 21 poems, 2 poets, one voice.

COLLABORATIVE POETRY AND EKPHRASIS

We kept going. But, this time we took on another challenge. To write as a collaborative team, but doing ekphrastic poetry. What’s that? Well, here are two definitions:

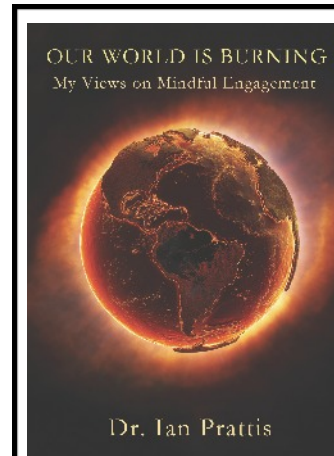
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Father Unknown By FRANÇOIS MAI

*A family struggling to survive
before, during, and after the
French revolution.*

www.francoismai.com



Now Available

*Our World Is Burning:
My Views on Mindful
Engagement*
By Dr. Ian Prattis

Available at:

<http://ianprattis.com/OurWorldIsBurning.html>

*Our fragile future and an
alternative way of living*

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Ekphrasis

“Description’ in Greek. An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the “action” of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning...’

—Poetry Foundation

“More generally, an ekphrastic poem is a poem inspired or stimulated by a work of art.”

—Wikipedia

By taking an ekphrastic approach, we brought the artist’s voice into our work to blend with our own. But rather than simply creating poems that describe the artwork, we often went instead with what it drew out of us as we each viewed the work.

We didn’t choose only paintings, but included photographs, artifacts, curiosities, sculptures, ceramics. But one can even write ekphrastic poems based on other poems or prose pieces.

Collaboration has had a great deal of influence on me and how I view my own writing, and poetry in general. It has helped me to find my own voice, to know what I feel strongly about in my writing, what techniques work and what do not. It’s also shown me where my prejudices lie, which darlings I might need to kill. What I can let go, and what I won’t. What I will fight for, and when compromise doesn’t compromise any of that. And finally, that sometimes I might know things.

At this point, we have two chapbooks, one that is ekphrastic, one not. And a manuscript for a full collection of both the poems in the chapbook and another two years’ work to create new poems.

There are still challenges. On our own, each of us has a different writing style. One of us edits, and edits again, the other edits a lot up front, and therefore often believes the poem is saying it’s done. We ponder periods, question question marks, pause over commas. And of course, the challenge of taking the manuscript from a collection of poems and making them into a real book.

But at each stage, we both grow as writers. Both of us work together to create that blended voice. Because we believe that other voice works, we never reveal who wrote what, even when we include poems we each wrote on our own. We include very

few of those, except when one of us is so taken with an image we’ve chosen that we want to work with it again, or with a particular artist whose work has drawn us in.

Throughout this collaboration, we have both challenged and encouraged each other, not just in the joint work, but to push forward in our individual writing life. Over the time, we have not just developed as a collaborative team, but we have also become good friends. We often touch base by email or phone, not to discuss the work, but just to find out how we’re doing. I think that adds another dimension to our writing. Perhaps not seen directly in the work, but certainly in the drive we bring as we work together.

For more about collaboration, **come to the CAA April meeting on Tuesday, April 10, 2018**, when my writing partner, **JC Sulzenko** will present the topic “Can you write a poem like ‘superstar’ Rupi Kaur (*Milk and Honey*, *The Sun and Her Flowers*)? Do you want to?” She’ll also share details about her writing life, for children to self-publishing, from writing collaboratively to assuming a pseudonym. JC will then lead an interactive romp through selections from Rupi Kaur’s work to enable participants to craft a poem.



BIO: Carol A. Stephen is an Ottawa area poet and former member of the Tree Reading Series (Ottawa) board and the CAA-NCR executive. She prepares the monthly literary notices for what’s happening in the Ottawa area. Her poetry appears in the May, 2017 issue of Poetry Is Dead, and in several regional print journals and publications, anthologies and online at Silver Birch Press, Topology Magazine, The Light Ekphrastic, and With Painted Words.

Chapbooks:

Above the Hum of Yellow Jackets, Bondi Studios, 2011

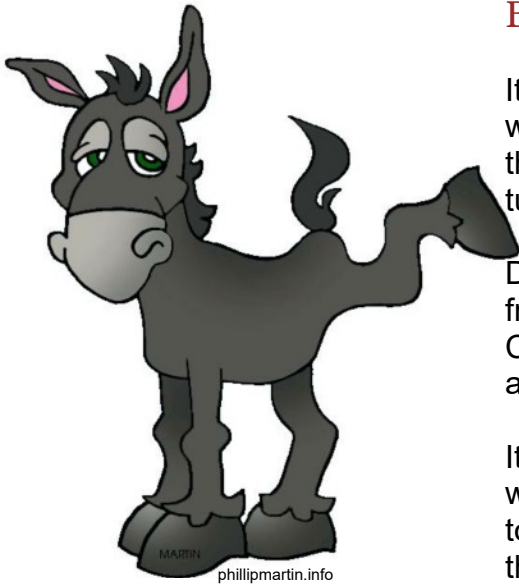
Architectural Variations, Quillfyre Publishing, 2012

Ink Dogs in my Shoes, Nose in Book Publishing, Castlegar B.C. 2014

Co-authored with JC Sulzenko: *Breathing Mutable Air*, May 2015, and *Slant of Light*, 2016 Nose in Book Publishing. The duo is working on their first full collection of ekphrastic poems.

A Day for Donkeys

By Carol A. Stephen



It was a day for donkeys, Sunday was,
with pale blue spring-promise sky,
the trickle-down sounds of melting corn snow, its late winter
tune for the soul, long buried under winter's white..

Donkeys, informal horses I call them, out at last
from winter barns, kick up their heels and frolic.
Comical fellows, with shaggy faces, crookedly cocked ears
and soft brown eyes that look at you sideways.

It was a day for donkeys, Sunday was,
when fields of winter turn fresh faces
to spring's warm light, everything restless with
the promise of new green—

Haiku by Gill Foss

melting ice
our relationship
follows suit

Haiku – by Gill Foss

Previously published in Haiku Canada

on a blue evening
the tallest pine
points to Venus

Haiku – by Gill Foss

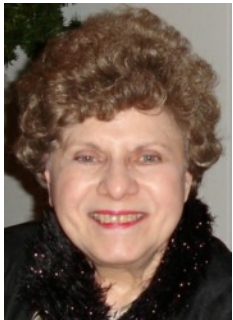
Previously published in Haiku Canada

wind chimes
with each breeze
a new song

Gill Foss is a member of Canadian Authors Association, Haiku Canada, T.O.P.S., and Ottawa's Field Stone Poets. Over the years many of her poems have appeared in a wide range of anthologies. She has two chapbooks published: A Window in Time (lyric) and Fleeting Moments (haiku) and has just completed a series of twelve villanelles. A fill-length manuscript is currently on the works. She maintains that living in the country is an inspiration.

A Strategic Plan for Book Promotion

BY BARBARA FLORIO GRAHAM



IT ALWAYS AMAZES me how many authors never prepare a strategic plan to promote their books. You need a plan regardless of how you choose to publish. If you're going to send a proposal to agents and/or publishers, your plan should be part of that document, to indicate that you know how and where the book will sell. A good marketing plan can often tip the balance in your favor when an agent or publisher is considering which books they will take on.

If you're self-publishing, you need to plan the promotion well before the book goes to the printer, not after! Key publicity before the book is published can prime reviewers and bookstores so that they're eager for your book to arrive in their hands.

Your strategic plan should be handled like a business project, with the goal date (publication) along with incremental steps leading up to that, spaced out over the number of months and weeks needed to accomplish them.

The first step is to write a strong blurb for the back cover. This becomes the lead of your cover letter to agents and publishers, or of the media release you'll send out if you self-publish. It's the core of all your promotional materials, and should be crafted carefully, tested repeatedly with friends who will give you candid feedback and suggest why it does or doesn't work.

The last step in your plan is the book launch. In between these two steps are all the things you can and should do to support the book. That means creating a website, or a page on your existing site dedicated just to this book (with a special box on your home page announcing the book and linking to the page containing the cover, blurb, and all the details).

Include postings about the book for social media, crafting a short, punchy general description first, then more specific "teasers" which will build interest in potential buyers. As soon as you have a cover, post it on Instagram. And tell all your

Facebook and LinkedIn contacts that a book is moving toward publication.

Part of your strategic plan for a new book should be to beta-test it. Many authors call on friends to read an early draft and provide frank feedback. Try to use non-writer friends as beta-testers, as they're less likely to be distracted by editing errors, and give you a more objective point of view.

It can help to provide beta-testers with questions to answer. Ian Shaw, current president of Ottawa Independent Writers, offers the following:

- Is the plot coherent? Is it too details, or too sparse?
- Are the characters believable? Are there too many characters to keep straight? Do any characters appear just once in the story and then evaporate?
- Is there a good balance between narrative and dialogue, description and backstory?

Compile these comments and remember that rewriting doesn't accomplish anything unless you first look at structure.

After you have written a second draft, consider sending it to a small group of different beta-testers.

Only after you have a final draft you're happy with, should this go out to key reviewers.

Testimonials from reviewers are key for your website and other promotional materials, and early reviews of the draft by key people in your special field can also be included in a proposal to an agent or publisher. If your book is non-fiction, find experts in the field. Fiction can benefit from endorsements by enthusiastic readers and librarians, children's books by teachers and parents.

My sold-out workshop on book promotion contained a hand-out for participants with my strategic plan for Mewsings/Musings, which I carried out over a full year prior to launch. That's available in the package of materials from that workshop which I offer for sale on my website.

A book I reviewed recently had really clever chapter titles. That could sell a potential buyer, if you include those on your website or in your

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Canadian Authors Association
National Capital Region
Branch

2017-18
Executive and Coordinators

Please feel free to contact any of the following with suggestions or concerns.

President	Arlene Smith
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Programs	Position open
Recording Secretary	Phyllis Bohonis
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Branch Historian	Gill Foss

NCWC	Sherrill Wark
Byline Editor	Sharyn Heagle
Website	Arlene Smith
Communications	Carol Stephen
Writing Circles	
West End	Kit Flynn

Writers Helping Writers



BOOK PROMOTION

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promotional materials. Decide whether a short excerpt, the table of contents, or something else from your book might help boost sales. Consider using these in social media posts.

Do you need a media kit for your self-published book? Yes, you do, but you don't need to spend a fortune to send these everywhere. Hand-deliver a few to key local media, and then follow up to see if the producer of host of a show wants a copy of the book.

Then mail media kits only to reviewers or broadcasters you know have a genuine interest in the book. These should be people you've researched by reading, listening, or watching them so you can personalize your covering letter, perhaps even mentioning something they said or wrote recently.

Media kits can also go to bookstores, with a "sell sheet" listing purchasing details, discounts, etc.

Unless you're an experienced speaker and aren't intimidated by microphones and cameras, you should include media training in your strategic plan.

Be prepared to give your book the best launch possible.



BIO: Author of Five Fast Steps to Better Writing (20th anniversary edition), Five Fast Steps to Low-Cost Publicity, and the award-winning Mewsings/Musings, Barbara Florio Graham is a publishing consultant and marketing strategist who offers mentoring, contract review, and online courses. Her popular website, <http://SimonTeakettle.com> contains a wealth of free information on writing and publishing.

Share your copy of Byline

If you love writing hints, NCWC winning poetry and short stories, information about Canadian Authors both regional and National, and being involved with a community of writers, pass along your copies of *Byline* to your friends and fellow writers.

They'll LOVE it too!

To have a copy delivered to their Inbox, they can subscribe through our [website](#), or contact the [Byline editor](#).

What You Missed: The Examined Life

Notes From Our February Meeting featuring Lee Ann Eckhardt Smith

BY SHARYN HEAGLE

AT THE FEBRUARY 13 CAA-NCR meeting, Lee Ann Eckhardt Smith spoke about understanding ourselves through memoir.

I have considered writing a memoir, but being an ordinary person having achieved nothing spectacular in my life, I decided it would be a boring piece of writing that would not interest my grandkids, even those who ask, “Did they have cars when you were a little girl, grandma?”

To me, a memoir recounted the fascinating and memorable life events of a well-known person, like Churchill's war stories or Trump's self-glorifying triumphs, not the humdrum of unknowns. Lee Ann opened our minds to a different viewpoint.

Opening with a 400 BC quote from Socrates: “The unexamined

life is not worth living,” Lee Ann had our attention at the get-go.


In explaining the What, When, Why of Memoir, Lee Ann makes the distinction between an autobiography, the story of a life, in whole or in part, and a memoir, the story from a life, an in-depth exploration of one particularly important, poignant or life-changing moment, the heart of the memoir.

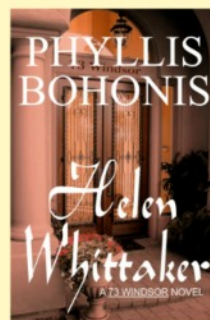
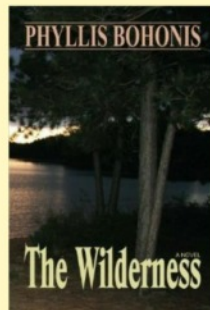
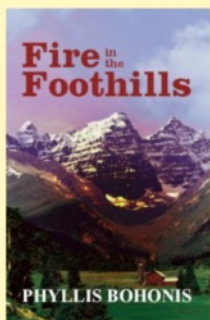
Examples might be, a woman's letter to her son, revealing the person she is that's greater than the title Mom, or how the 1998 ice storm, “One of the Worst Weather Events in Canadian History,” altered our perception of the power of nature or the kindness of our neighbours. Any event that creates conflict, that challenges or was just significant to the writer, can be the catalyst for a memoir.

Lee Ann provided us with a suggested reading list, and some writing prompts to get us started, things like: I remember... I never thought I would . . . If I could see you again, I would tell you this . . .

She advised us to examine our truths, tell our truths one story at a time, and tell a universal truth via a personal one. As Lee Ann put it, “A memoir can transform the pain of the past into clarity and provide an insightful exploration into an aspect of life, a time of life, or a certain place in time.”

Lee Ann showed us a TED Talk by Anne Lamotte: “12 truths I learned from writing.” (Look it up. It's insightful, succinct and funny.)

It was a fantastic evening that sent us home with a lot to think about. Sorry you missed it. 



LOVE MYSTERY? SUSPENSE? ROMANCE?
Canadian Fiction in Canadian Settings

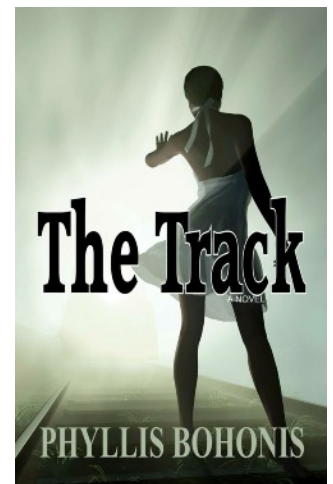
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Why I Nearly Squashed My Cat

BY SHERRILL WARK

THIS MORNING I nearly squashed my cat. And it's all because I asked God for boobs.

I'm tall. I used to be extremely skinny. Underweight. Bordering on anorexia. One day I prayed for boobs. Why not? I was in my late fifties and I'd never had any to speak of.

God works in mysterious ways. She can be downright sarcastic — even, God forbid, *nasty* sometimes: “Oy. You don't like the way I made you? Boobs? You want boobs? I'll give you boobs. The *haaaahd* way.” (For some reason, even though I think of God, not as a person but as a Spirit, she always has a New York accent.)

So I start having big problems in my marriage. Problems like having to dodge insults, meanness, and false accusations on a daily basis so my drunken husband can berate his own shortcomings which, of course, are my fault somehow. Then he wants sex.

“What? Are you *nuts*? *NOW*?”

So I became “mean” and “didn't love him” was “after his money” and “insert generic whine here.”

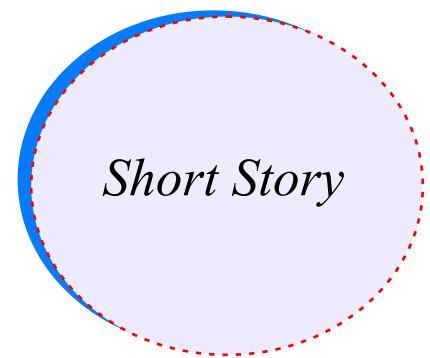
So our relationship fell apart further and further. Eventually, it got to the point where I tried to kill myself round about the time one of his girlfriends told me I was being melodramatic and wasn't depressed at all, every couple has their little ups and downs, their innocent little arguments, and he is such a sweet man who would never,

ever raise his voice to anyone. Of course I hadn't battled depression since my youth, she informed me. I had always been *skinny*. What's to be depressed about, she wondered? She knew that if *she* was skinny like me, she would be happy as a fart in a famine and would *never* be depressed. “Don't be so stupid.” “You're so lucky.” “You're being melodramatic.” (The latter being *my* word about *her* to *him*.)

After my exceedingly *much*-intended (no melodrama here, honey, it's all about escaping from his drunken extra-rages following his visits with *YOU!*) suicide attempt “we almost lost you” the doctor told me angrily —I made three monumental decisions: I stopped self-medicating with alcohol and gained thirty pounds; I stopped smoking and gained a further twenty-five; I left the Neanderthal to his beer, his girlfriends, and his rage and gained another fifteen pounds in the women's shelter. (One of the other women was Polish and she cooked *anything* you could possibly imagine or desire. From scratch. Frequently.)

I now had lovely boobs. From training bra to a breath-robbing 40-C in 24 months. Thank you. Praise God for always giving us what we ask for.

I don't like to cook for just me so the three more-or-less-healthy meals a day I was taking turns preparing at the shelter faded into dusty, cobwebbed memory when I moved out on my own. Rock-bottom minimum income, no desire to cook, corner



store close by on the . . . well, on the corner . . . mere steps away. (Not exactly an aerobic workout going there for groceries, was it?) My “groceries” provided all the food groups: dairy — ice cream; protein — chicken wieners; carbohydrates — white squishy bread, or the occasional pasta. Then you wash all that down with Diet Coke.

I quickly lost the fifteen pounds I'd gained at the shelter, plus another five. *I am on a ROLL! Yessss! I will continue to lose another twenty, retain the old booberinos I worked so hard to get, and life will be unsurpassably grand.*

Right. Things always look just marvey in theory, don't they?

That's where the scales appeared to stick on my high-tech *gen-u-ine* Weight Watchers scales with the little “R” for Registered Trademark beside the name. These are the scales the whole family can use. You can set them for Person-1, Person-2, Person-3 and Person-4. You can set them with a “start weight” and a “goal weight.” The little minus or plus sign beside *aaaalll* the in-between weights will announce your interim successes and your miserable failures every time you stand on that hateful, smarmy, mocking WW logo on the way to your “goal.”

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WHY I NEARLY SQUASHED MY CAT

continued from page 11

No matter what I did, no matter how much ice-cream I denied myself, no matter how many hours I power-walked through the weather-less, always bright and welcoming corridors of the vast three-tiered Rideau Shopping Centre, no matter how many turns of the wheel I cranked out on the fake bike in the pathetically equipped exercise room in my seniors-only apartment building, I could not budge from a Body Mass Index in the middle of the “overweight” range. Perhaps my ex-husband’s overly plump girlfriend was right. Perhaps there *was* a very different side to depression after all.

My doctor told me not to worry. I wasn’t obese. I was just overweight. A tad.

I bought myself a ton of groceries at the real store and made a month’s worth of From-Scratch food, eschewing everything else including my ice-cream and hot dogs for that time period. I lost nearly eight pounds! *Hoorah!* Four pounds from each boob. Nowhere else.

I want my boobs. I will accept the rest of the “curves” that go along with them. But I don’t want to be out of breath, nor cry out when my legs cramp just by trying to stand up from the couch, I don’t want my legs to shake if I lift anything heavier than my twelve-pound cat. We need to do some serious exercise here, girl! Get toned! Get muscled up! Get limber again!

Yoga! Brilliant idea! Let’s go back to yoga. We know how to do that. We’ve done it before. Maybe we were in our thirties when we did it before, but what

the hey. I saw that eighty-seven-year-old body builder on the *Tyra Banks Show* last week. What an inspiration! There’s hope for all of us!

So I purchase a book called *Total Astanga: The step-by-step guide to Power Yoga at home for everybody*. The author is a pretty, exceptionally fit-looking young western woman named Tara Fraser. Perfect! I will read it all the way through just like she told me to do, before I attempt any postures. And I will go very slowly just like she told me to do. (If nothing else, I was always an eager, obedient student.)

It all looks very easy. I’ve done *all* those exercises in that “surya namaskara A” set before. I know I can’t do the one called the “Uttanasana.” Not just yet, I tell myself. I can’t even *touch* my toes and this posture requires that I place my hands flat on the floor beside my feet. “Ha ha,” I chuckle. “I will soon conquer *thee*.” I will begin with the “surya namaskara A/Modified” set which allows me to grasp my ankles, or even the backs of my knees — or thighs — if necessary, and in no time I will be bending in half double, just like that young woman in the photos.

I am ready. My yoga mat is spread out on the kitchen floor as I prepare for the Samasthiti. This one is easy. You just stand there, feet slightly apart, hands at your side. You breathe. Good. Got it.

The next one is easy too. You raise your arms above your head, bringing your palms together. *Aha*. I can do that. I’ve been power-lifting my twelve-

pound cat daily for months. My hard work has paid off! I can lift my arms above my shoulders. Hot damn, I’m in good shape!

“Inhale.”

I can do that.

“Exhale, fold downward at your hips ...”

“Fold? *FOLD?*” Ah yes. This is the “Uttanasana” (see above) the one I plan to “conquer” very shortly. I fold myself as best I can and am delighted to discover that I can grasp my ankles. Well, more calf than ankle, I guess, but I’m doing much better than I thought I’d do. I can feel the blood rushing to my head. I wonder if I’ll end up with a nosebleed.

“Inhale. Look forward.”

Okay. I can see the cat circling about two feet from my toes. Correction: I can see the cat from his neck down.

“Exhale, jump back leaving your hands on the floor.”

Huh? Oh, yes. It says in the “Modified” section: if you can’t “jump” back with your feet, you can walk back. No problem. I’ll just . . .

That’s odd. My feet seem to be sticking to the yoga mat. I find it necessary to lean right, then left, in order to get my feet to move even by microscopic increments. Gradually, I get my feet to where it appears they are supposed to be according to the picture. From this angle, my toes look lovely with their pink polish, although the left big toe feels like it’s going to cramp up any second.

“Breathe.”

I can do that.

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WHY I NEARLY SQUASHED MY CAT

continued from page 12

So there I am with my toes curled gracefully toward me, my butt is in the air, and my elbows are locked. Excellent! I've mastered the transition pose between the Uttanasana and the upcoming Chaturanga. I am surprisingly stable in this position. My arms are weak but my skeleton is strong. I am supported by solid bone on the front end, and by my feet upon which I have been relying for the last sixty-two years. (The human body is such a marvel of engineering, isn't it?)

The cat circles beneath my chest, rubbing his tail across my neck as he passes. He turns and repeats going in the other direction, tail across my face. He loves the feel of the soft, squishy yoga mat on his feet. And he trusts the marvel of engineering that arches above him.

My next move is supposed to be to lower my whole body to the floor without—*most importantly*—arching my body—in either direction. (This is to protect my

back from certain injury, writes the author. I think she probably knows what she's talking about because when I try to bend my knees thinking this will no doubt be the only way out of the posture, the muscles there cry out: "You do and the cat gets it, baby!")


The cat is oblivious to my dilemma. He purrs and circles, circles and purrs. *Mommy has built me a tent to walk mindlessly around under. What a wonderful mommy I have.*

"Bixby! Get the hell out of the way!"

Purr. Rub. Circle. Purr. Rub.

My other cat who dislikes Bixby quite a bit, lies a couple of feet away from us. She has to be thinking something along the lines of "this oughta be good" because she has her tail curled around her body as though planning to stay a while, and she appears to be smiling.

I am still at a loss as to how I managed to eventually get

upright again. Both cats are still alive and uncrushed. My back doesn't hurt. I'm feeling rather frisky actually. Maybe when I try again tomorrow to perform the "surya namaskara A/Modified," I'll lock the cats up first. 

BIO: Sherrill Wark is a novelist, screenwriter, short story writer, poet, book designer, former editor, not-so-little ol' lady but is otherwise normal.

Sherrill is writing a series of historical novels about the Acadian people written from the point of view of Keskoua, a Mi'gmaw woman, and set in Port Royal, Acadia (Annapolis Royal NS): Death in l'Acadie; Refuge in l'Acadie; Trapped in l'Acadie; The Hanging; The Cleansing; & The Expulsion. The first two are available at Amazon.com, the third is in the works. She sings soprano secundi in an Italian choir and kills people off in her dark short stories under a pseudonym.

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CAA NATIONAL OFFICE

By phone
705 325 3926

By email
admin@canadianauthors.org

By mail
6 West Street N, Suite 203
Orillia, Ontario L3V 5B8