



Byline

WINTER 2018

A free and priceless gift

BY ARLENE SMITH

The days grow shorter as we move toward late December, and the list of activities grows longer. Whether we celebrate Hanukkah, Christmas, or Festivus for the Rest of Us, we all have to juggle socializing, eating, drinking and shopping. The bustle isn't enjoyable for everyone, and sometimes depression or anxiety complicate the already pressure-filled dark month. And we're supposed to find the time and motivation to write too? Sometimes it feels like there aren't enough hours in the day.

How do we make our writing time a priority?

During November many writers use [National Novel Writing Month \(NaNoWriMo\)](#) to motivate themselves. They sign up and make a public commitment to write 50,000 words by November 30. The open declaration and the support of fellow writers serves people well in getting words on the page—words they can work with and build on later.

And then comes December. Momentum killer.

With no word count stipulations or group support, we need to find another way to motivate. Perhaps a more fitting notion for the season is that of gifting ourselves writing time. We can choose to play Santa Claus for ourselves and say, "I give myself two hours on Saturday afternoon for writing." Or we can request it of our families or significant others. "Your Christmas gift to me is three hours of quiet time on Boxing Day."

The gift of writing time is free and priceless.

It costs nothing but it's an immeasurably valuable reminder to ourselves and those around us that we love to write, we need the time, and the creative outlet feeds us.

Happy writing.
Arlene



A January Challenge

We take a break from the snowy commute in the dark hours of winter.

No meeting in January!

Why not spend the time that evening doing some writing?

Tues, January 8

7:15 p.m.

Writing Time!

[See our full list of meeting topics.](#)

canadian
authors

Writers helping writers since 1921

OUR MEETINGS

7:15 p.m.

McNabb Recreation Centre,
180 Percy Street at Gladstone

Tues., February 12, 2019

Step by Step to Completion, with Jennifer Mulligan

Are you mired in a mound of half-completed manuscripts or stuck in the middle of a novel you can't quite finish? Are your notes scattered and all over the place? Accomplished screenwriter, Jennifer Mulligan, leads us in steps she follows to complete her works—steps that adapt to all kinds of writing.

<http://jennifermulligan.com/>

Tues., March 12, 2019

Polishing Your Manuscript, with Nerys Parry

You've completed your manuscript and now you want to send it out to the world. Before you do, you need to make sure it is as professional as possible. Nerys Parry shares her expertise in preparing a polished manuscript.

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

Tues., April 9, 2019

Not Your Parents' Poetry Workshop, with Pearl Pirie

April is Poetry Month. Pearl Pirie will lead us in celebrating and create poetry.

Tues., May 14, 2019

2019 National Capital Writing Contest

At the Ottawa Public Library, Main Branch
Auditorium

7:00 p.m.

We honour the finalists in the 2019 National Capital Writing Contest.

Tues., June 11, 2019

Summer Social

Details to follow.

Judge's Comment

...free verse poem about winter: its harsh nature, and the struggles to survive it while waiting for spring. Evocative images of birds insistent to be fed, and the cold beauty of its landscape.

—Carol A. Stephen, NCWC 2018 Poetry Judge

Poetry - 2018 NCWC
Honourable Mention

The Seasons

BY IAN PRATTIS

Winter's swift warning

lay quiet and mantled on trees

formerly vibrant with autumn's life.

The shapes of summer submerged
in grotesque beauty as bitter cold sets in

freezing fingers of ungloved hands.

In the rhythm of seasons,

the old ones in their late season

notice and nod, calmly carrying on

in their private wisdom.

Birds driven by winter's warning

fluff their feathers and dance in the cold,

tapping on windows their insistence for the old man

to nail the feeder to the sugar maple

reserved for their winter joy by the farmhouse window.

So soon have summer's fruits given way

to this stretch of nature's dominion.

A long wait until man and land renews

in springtime's burst.

Nature's cycle, its rhythm undeterred

etches seeds of decay, silence and renewal with an unseen hand
that speaks to us

should we care to listen to that voice.



SHORT STORY POINTERS

From Jean Van Loon's presentation at our September meeting

NARRATIVE DRIVE: THE ESSENCE OF STORY

- Something has to happen. Something has to trigger that happening. Consequences have to follow.
- A pattern of **conflict, action, resolution** shapes every scene, keeping the story alive every step of the way.
- Structure the events for dramatic effect. The narrative arc need not be chronological or linear. Plots can weave in and out of another, or a narrative may go along in side-by-side plotlines.
- Good endings are surprising but inevitable. A change must have occurred.

CHARACTERS

- Characters must engage in conflict. Don't be kind to your characters; subject them to stress, make them suffer.
- A character also has to be complex, with imperfections, contradictions, aspects that are sympathetic and ones not so much.
- Don't stop at describing physical attributes. Select information about a character that contributes to the story.
- Dialogue lets characters emerge, but keep it brief and purposeful.

SETTING

- A strange, secret, or unfamiliar setting can be one of the attractions in a story.
- Appeal to multiple senses, not just sight, but sound, smell, touch.
- Be selective and only include details that contribute to the overall impact of the story

THEME

- Don't spell out a story's meaning. Lay out the necessary details and let the reader make the leap.

Get your short stories ready for the NCWC

THE 32ND ANNUAL NATIONAL CAPITAL WRITING CONTEST 2019

Sponsored by the Canadian Authors Association–National Capital Region

Short Story • Poetry

\$300 First Place • \$200 Second Place • \$100 Third Place

Open to residents of Ontario and Quebec.

Deadline: 11:59 PM/23h59 EST **Friday, February 8, 2019**

Submissions may be sent via regular mail or submitted online.

Entry Fees: Short Story: \$15 per single story; Poetry: \$5 per single poem.

Short Story: Maximum 2,500 words, unpublished, in English.

Poetry: Max. 60 lines including title and blank lines, unpublished, in English.

<http://canadianauthors.org/nationalcapitalregion/contests/ncwc/>

SETTING WRITING GOALS

By Catina Noble

AS THE NEW Year approaches I have been thinking a lot about my writing goals—how to finally finish a particular piece, how to work on more than one project and how to get my writing out there.

Often in the past, I asked myself if it was important to set writing goals. In speaking with my writing friends, it seemed that many of them had specific writing goals and had, through trial and error, developed routines that worked to help them achieve them.

When I first thought about getting serious with my writing, I was under the false impression that I would only write when I felt the need to, or that if I just sat down to write, words would magically start flowing onto the paper or on my computer screen. That is not the case.

Words do not always appear when we want them to, and if you want your work out there, you have to be consistent. As much as I and many other writers love writing, it is work. If we want these writing tasks and

projects done, then we have to apply ourselves just as if we were putting together a bookcase.

There are many ideas to help keep me focused, and I am sure you can come up with a few of your own.

- I start with one goal, focus on it for a week or two and then consider adding another goal the next week. I do not want to be overwhelmed with too many goals at once.
- I make writing goals manageable.
- I keep a notebook or note pad with me at all times to jot down ideas. This also comes in handy for nuggets of information that might be used later in one of my pieces.
- I try to keep positive and active. I cannot just wake up one morning, set a few writing goals and voila, everything runs smoothly. It takes action.
- Consistency is key. I set a goal and try to stick with it. Not just for a day or two but for weeks.

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Phyllis Bohonis

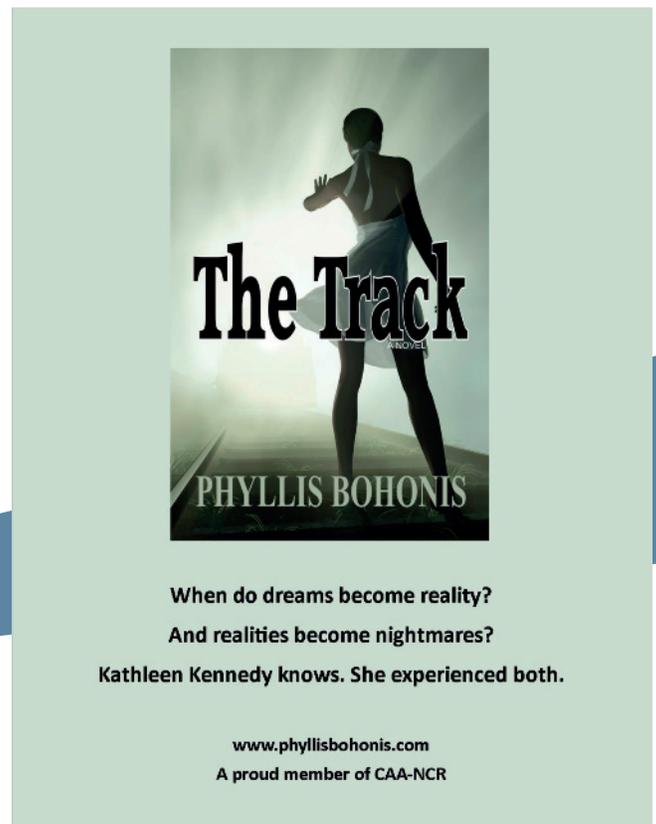
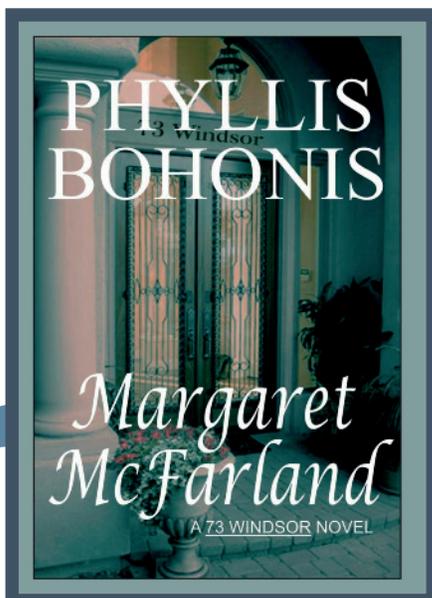
New in the 73 Windsor series.

You need a new man in your life they said.

You have to get out more and add excitement to your life they said.

So she did—and abruptly disappeared.

www.phyllisbohonis.com



SETTING WRITING GOALS

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- I have learned to say “no.” My writing is for me and I need to make it a priority.
- I remind myself to keep writing because I want to. This is something for ME. I think of all the time, love and energy I give to everything and everyone else every day. Writing is something I do for myself.
- I picked a writing partner to check in with to keep me accountable. I meet with my writing partner on the same day every week at a local coffee shop. This has been the biggest boost towards success for me. It has kept me motivated and focused. I have been doing this for a couple of years now.

As 2019 approaches, there is no better time to get started on writing goals. It's easy to put things off again and again, only to find an entire year has gone by and nothing has been accomplished. Not this year. I'm ready.

What about you?



BIO: Catina Noble has over a hundred publications including books, poetry, articles and short stories. In 2014 her poem 'You Can't See Me' won first place in the CAA-NCR poetry contest.

Byline is looking for your input!

- What puts fire in your writing belly?
- What moves your butt from TV viewing to the writing desk?
- What keeps you focused on that work-in-progress?
- How do you ignore the unending should doos and focus on creatively important must doos.

How do you turn

“I should have finished” into “I just published”?

Share your tips for writing success and we will publish them in upcoming issues, along with one sentence that describes you, such as author of ... teacher of ... parent of ...

Send your ideas to the Editor.

Your community of writers will be grateful.

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Pass along *Byline* to your friends and fellow writers.

They can subscribe through our [website](#), or contact the [editor](#).

Byline Advertising Rates

Members are entitled to a 1/8-page advertisement at no cost.

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Otherwise, Member Rates are:

Single issue:	1/8 Byline page: N/C
	1/4 Byline page: \$15
	1/2 Byline page: \$30
One year - Quarterly	(4 issues - price of three)
	1/8 Byline page: N/C
	1/4 Byline page: \$45
	1/2 Byline page: \$90

Non-Member Rates

Single issue:	1/8 Byline page: \$15
	1/4 Byline page: \$30
	1/2 Byline page: \$50
One year: Quarterly	(4 issues - price of three)
	1/8 Byline page: \$45
	1/4 Byline page: \$90
	1/2 Byline page: \$150

Note: Yearly prices reflect the cost of three issues; the fourth publication is free .

Byline is distributed by e-mail to those on our extensive CAA-NCR mailing list.

To have your name added to our mailing lists, contact the [editor](#).



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

MARKETING 101

SELF PROMOTION FOR WRITERS: SARAH SAMBLES' TIPS FROM OUR NOVEMBER MEETING

<https://sarahsambles.com/>

THINGS THAT HOLD PEOPLE BACK

- The things we tell ourselves:
 - “I can't do this.”
 - “I studied literature not business.”
 - “I have a BA not an MBA.”
 - “I'm an introvert. The thought of 'promoting myself' makes me feel violently sick.””

THE SECRET INGREDIENT

- Empathy

EFFECTIVE COPY (YOUR BIO, BOOK BLURB, ETC.)

- Don't assume that because you can write a story, you can write your own copy well.
- Get to know your ideal reader. What are their challenges, needs, desires, interests? Why do they read? What do they want to get from a book? What makes them stop reading?
- Identify the benefit that your writing will give to them. Start with the reader not the book.

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Do you need social media? Not necessarily, but if you do, do it to connect, not sell books.
- Find out which platform your readers use and platform suits your personality.
- It's not about the BIGGEST audience, but the RIGHT audience.
- Ensure you have a website Consider a blog Consider an email newsletter

SWOT (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESS, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS)

- Find and study three comparable authors: their online copy, connections with readers, and collaborations with peers.
- Clarify WHY you write and WHO you write for.
- Stop trying to sell a book. Remember it's about RELATIONSHIP and EMPATHY.

NEXT STEPS

- Make a list of 10 readers. What do you want to know from them? Ask them and chart their answers
- Look at your copy with fresh eyes.

On November 19, 2018, CAA-NCR members Emily-Jane Hills Orford and Phyllis Bohonis were the guest speakers at the North Grenville Writers Circle. They spoke about the importance of being involved in a writing community.



BEHIND THE SCENES

THE FASCINATING CREATION OF FAMOUS WORKS

By Barbara Kyle

www.BarbaraKyle.com

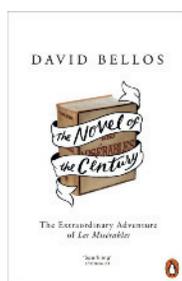


I LOVE FINDING OUT how works of art came to life. The path of creation can be a twisty journey, even for the most gifted and celebrated.

So let me share with you six fascinating books that take you "behind the scenes."

Three are about famous novels. Two are about much-loved films. One is about a grand symphony.

I've enjoyed them all and highly recommend them!



The Novel of the Century: The Extraordinary Adventures of Les Misérables
by David Bellos

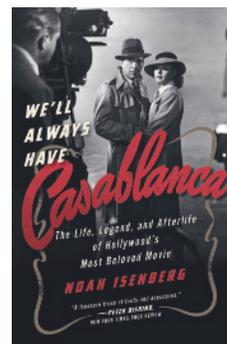
This engaging narrative is a biography not of the great writer Victor Hugo but of his masterpiece, *Les Misérables*. Bellos traces the life of the 1500-page novel from conception to publication. It took Hugo 17 years to write *Les Misérables*, from his first draft penned in Paris in 1845 when he was the honored great man of letters to its completion in 1862 when he was an outcast living in exile on the island of Guernsey. There, he secured the publishing deal of the century.



Goodbye Christopher Robin: A.A. Milne and the Making of Winnie-the-Pooh
by Ann Thwaite

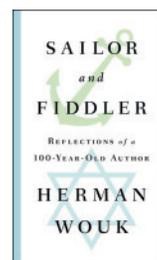
Biographer Ann Thwaite reveals the creative process of A. A. Milne, author of *Winnie-the-Pooh* and Pooh Bear's enchanting adventures with Christopher Robin, who was

Milne's own son. Before its publication Milne was a well-known playwright and columnist but he refused to be typecast. His publishers despaired when he turned from writing popular columns for *Punch* to writing detective stories, and they complained again when he presented them with a set of children's verse. But the verses led to the creation of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, one of the best-selling books of all time, making Milne one of the world's favorite authors.



We'll Always Have Casablanca: The Life, Legend, and Afterlife of Hollywood's Most Beloved Movie
by Noah Isenberg

The origins of this famous film lie in a 1940 stage play called *Everybody Comes to Rick's* by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison. Their play was transformed by screenwriters Howard Koch and Julius and Philip Epstein into the screenplay that became the brilliant 1942 film. Isenberg details that transformation, and his book is full of fascinating details, some quite moving, such as the central role that refugees from Hitler's Europe played in the production; nearly all of the cast of *Casablanca* were immigrants.



Sailor and Fiddler by Herman Wouk

A sparkling memoir about the well-lived life in literature by one of the world's best-loved authors. At age 100(!) Herman Wouk reflects on his experiences that inspired his most enduring novels. He tells of writing for comedian

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BEHIND THE SCENES

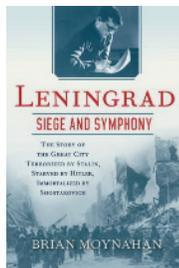
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Fred Allen's radio show, enlisting in the US Navy during World War II, falling in love with the woman who would become his wife (and literary agent) for sixty-three years, writing his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Caine Mutiny*, and the surprising inspirations and people behind his masterpieces *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*.



The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries
by Emma Thompson

The multi-talented actor/writer Emma Thompson won a well-deserved Oscar for her screenplay that adapted the Jane Austen novel *Sense and Sensibility*, and she also starred in the beautiful 1995 film made from it, directed by Ang Lee. This marvelous book includes Thompson's complete shooting script plus her astute diaries detailing the production of this film graced by some of the finest British actors, including Kate Winslet, the late Alan Rickman, and Greg Wise whom Thompson met during the filming and subsequently married.



Leningrad: Siege and Symphony by Brian Moynahan

The siege of Leningrad was the Nazis' pitiless 900-day encirclement of the Soviet Union's second city, from 1941 to 1944, in which hundreds of thousands of civilians starved to death. During that horror a dedicated makeshift orchestra of emaciated musicians performed the newly created "Seventh Symphony" of Dmitri Shostakovich for an audience of starving, but rapt, music lovers. This true story is an inspiring testament to the redemptive power of a great work of art.

May the examples of these gifted and dedicated artists inspire you on the twisty but oh-so-satisfying journey to your own finished work of art.

All my best,
Barbara Kyle
www.BarbaraKyle.com
bkyle@barbarakyle.com



P.S. Let Page-Turner guide you to success. "Kyle breaks down both the art and the craft of writing in a way that is entertaining and easy to understand." — #1 New York Times bestselling author Kelley Armstrong. Available in paperback, e-book, and — new! — audiobook. Listen to an excerpt [here](#).

WANTED

Editor for *Byline Magazine*

Brief description of duties:

- Ensures that *Byline*, published quarterly, offers readers timely and informative articles on the creative and business aspects of writing and the writers' market.
- Encourages submissions that support the writing community from CAA members and others.
- Informs contributors of submission deadlines.
- Edits submitted material as required and passes it on for layout.
- Participates as a member of the CAA-NCR executive and keeps current with NCR branch activities and concerns.
- Knowledge of or experience in electronic graphic design an asset but not required.

NOTE: This is a volunteer position.

Contact [Arlene Smith](#), President

STAY SECURE ONLINE

By Barbara Florio Graham

<http://SimonTeakettle.com>



THE BASICS OF online security are available to members at the Writers Editors Network [WEN](#) site. Look for the listing for Security and download the PDF. But here are a few other tips which can protect you from hacking.

Paul Meyers from [TalkBiz Digital](#) says you should check to how secure your web host and the host of your blog are, by using a program like GravityScan. If you want to run a more comprehensive and accurate scan, you can sign up for a free account and run a Full Scan.

Consider the wisdom of controlling your own website. If you create it yourself you don't have to worry about the host suddenly going out of business or being sold (yes, that's happened more than once), and you can add pages or make changes any time you wish.

I created my site using [Web Express](#), originally developed by MacMillan, but now available from Label Gear. It's easy to use, and offers more flexibility and security than blogging platforms or other free sites, any of whom can suddenly decide to charge for some services, or eliminate advantages you counted on.

If you have a blog attached to your website, as I do, every time you post on social media and link to your blog, visitors are sent to your website where they'll see your books and anything else you have to offer.

Only the paid versions of blogging platforms or free websites offer the same security and flexibility of your own site. Some of the free sites offer basic security, but their add-ons and plug-ins may not.

I pay a trusted, local ISP (internet service provider) a small monthly fee to host both my website and my email. That provides me with several email addresses, all attached to my site, and the ability to use my site in any way that suits me.

But the most important thing is to keep your website safe. Think carefully before you add a comment section to your site or blog, and invite feedback. You may enjoy

receiving positive comments, but it can be hard to remove negative remarks, especially since previous versions of websites are cached which means you never really get rid of things you delete.

Paid email services offer more storage for each account, around-the-clock technical support, fewer outages than a free service may experience, and no ads along the sides of the inbox. Keep I mind that if you're seeing ads, the service you're using is tracking your email content in order to find ads they feel will interest you!

It's harder for providers to do this if your email provider doesn't connect with your computer calendar, web searches, and Google maps.

Using different suppliers for different services means if one is hacked or goes down, you still have other means of communication. My cable/Internet/phone supplier wanted me to buy my cell service from them, but I opted to use a different provider, so if I lose my landline phone due to a power or cable outage, I still have a phone.

Many of you may store files in "the cloud." I don't trust my files in the ether where hacking problems have occurred. It's the same reason why I won't use yahoo, hotmail, or gmail for my email. My email is attached to my website, and only remains on the server (a local company I've trusted for more than two decades) for a week, as that allows me to retrieve it in case of a crash.

Be very careful about what you share on social media. If it's worth publishing, don't broadcast it where anyone can lift your words or photos and claim them as their own! I know writers who share work in progress because they enjoy the feedback they receive from strangers on Facebook who follow them. They don't understand why this is so dangerous until their work is stolen and appears under someone else's byline.

BIO: Barbara Florio Graham mentors writers, serves as a publishing consultant, and offers a contract review service. The author of three books, her website is full of free information.

www.SimonTeakettle.com

BEYOND HRV*

By Gillian Foss

At first the odd events seemed strange,
mere sprinklings from a caster
until we recognized climate change.

Mudslides, floods widened the range
of antidotes that we should muster.
At first the odd events seemed strange

but then we started to exchange
our thinking, moving faster
until we recognized climate change

could be our fault, ours to arrange
a new approach that we must master.
At first the odd events seemed strange

before emissions which shortchange
life's quality, our next disaster,
until we recognized climate change

would need us all to rearrange
a joint approach to foreclose faster.
At first the odd events seemed strange
until we recognized climate change.

*HRV – *Historic Range of Variability*

2018 NCWC Poetry - Third Place

Judge's Comment

The theme of "Beyond HRV" is climate change, a present-day concern. The contrast between form and theme is intriguing. The form chosen is a English villanelle, popularized in the nineteenth century. The poem requires both a particular rhyme scheme and repeating structure in the lines. The first and third lines of the poem appear alternately as the last line in subsequent stanzas, with these lines also forming the concluding couplet.

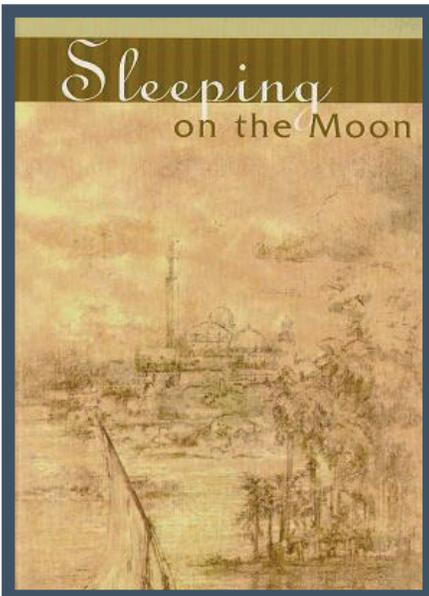
"Beyond HRV" is an excellent example of this form, revealing no forced rhymes or inverted syntax needed to comply with its constraints. Well done by a skilled poet.

—Carol A. Stephen, Poetry Category Judge

Our Canadian Authors Association members at work

Sylvia Adams

Poems that recreate the life of Florence von Sass, her wanderings through Africa and love affair with traveling companion, eventual husband, the explorer Samuel Baker. Runner-up for the Scott-Lampman Award.
[Sylvia Adams Publications](#)



Richard I. Bourgeois-Doyle

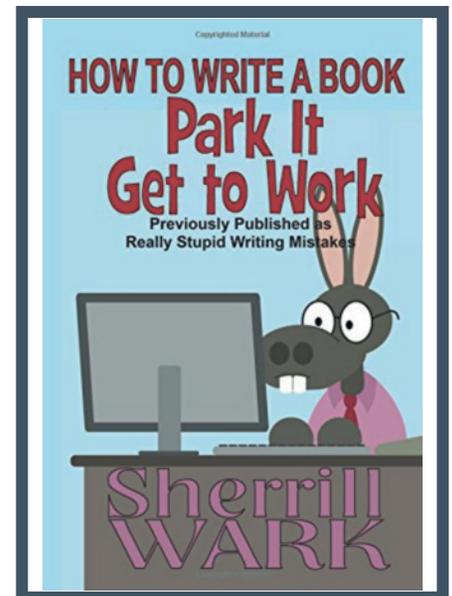
Elsie MacGill, the world's first female aeronautical engineer and professional aircraft designer, influenced early bush planes and guided production of famous aircraft in World War II.
[NRCresearchpress.com](#)



Sherrill Wark

Available at
[Amazon.com](#)
[Amazon.ca](#)

Or order it through your favourite bookstore.
A remake/remodel/update of the original
Really Stupid Writing Mistakes.



Leaving Is Just a Suitcase Away

BY INGRID BETZ

HE WATCHED SIDNEY slide his arm with casual ease along the sofa back behind Helen Gillemot and thought of the suitcase standing packed and ready in the closet of the spare room.

“Dilly! Lovely party!” The couple from next door started the cry and soon it went up all around the big comfortable room. Faces gleamed warmly in the candlelight. “Great anniversary bash! Twenty-five years married – don’t know how you stuck it out.”

Dilly Webster smiled and smiled, the way she had been doing all evening and moved gracefully from sofa to chair groupings and through the open glass doors to offer her platter of bacon-wrapped sausages and goat-cheese mini-quiches to the younger guests who’d spilled out onto the patio. Overhead the vine leaves rustled dryly as they did every September. Hands reached up to her.

“Fabulous food!”

“Did you make these yourself? So clever of you!”

Not cleverness, long practice, thought Dilly. She was good at party food. It went with the territory of being the wife of one half of the Swan & Webster Lexus dealership.

“Little lady’s a credit to you, Sid. Make no mistake,” boomed Reg Swan when she got back inside. He’d been topping his punch with Crown Royal and his voice was even louder and heartier than normal. “You’re one hell of a lucky bastard to have her.”

“Don’t I know it,” said Sidney, laughing. But his eyes were on Helen

Judge’s Comment

This well-crafted story is about hope and the surprises life brings when least expected. It is also about love and the ties that come with that love. The story fully engages the reader and draws them into its unfolding. The heroine is finely drawn with all the hidden facets of a real person. She leaves the reader feeling resigned yet wanting more for her.

A memorable story.

R.J. Harlick, Short Story Category Judge

Gillemot as he said it, and Dilly knew in her bones that he’d chosen her to be the next one.

* * *

“What’s that, his fourth? Tell me this time you’re not going to put up with it.” Ravenna Burke was Dilly’s best friend. She’d stayed behind to help clean up after everyone else had gone. Her sequined spectacles flashed outrage. “I mean, on your anniversary. At his own party! Everybody could tell what was going on.”

Dilly nodded into the dishwasher. She’d seen the exchange of glances.

“Where is he, anyway? He should be helping with these glasses.”

“He’s driving Helen home. Said she’d had too much to drink and as the host he felt responsible.”

“God.”

“She’s very pretty. All that hair,” said Dilly, conscious of her own graying blunt cut.

“And half his age. Who is she, anyway?”

“Receptionist at work. After Mrs. Harrington retired. Is that the lot?”

“Yes. What about these quiches? The left-over sausages?”

2018 NCWC
Short Story
First
Place

“I’ll put them in the fridge.” She reached for sealable glass containers. “He can have them for his supper tomorrow.”

“Dilly! Are you actually saying –”

“I think so. All I’ve got to pack is my toothbrush.”

“I never thought I’d see the day.” Ravenna gave her a look of respect. “Leave tonight, why not?” she urged. “Before he gets back. You can stay with me.” She lived one street over in a Mediterranean-style condo. Her husband was somebody in the Foreign Service and not often home.

“No. I’ll wait till morning. After I tell him. I owe him that much.”

Ravenna groaned. “He’ll try and talk you out of it. You know he will.”

“It’s too late.” Dilly measured out dishwasher liquid. “That caterer I know in Toronto? I phoned her. Not only has she already hired me, she offered to put me up until I find a place of my own to live.”

“Toronto! You really are serious.”

“Oh Ravenna! When he told me he’d invited this Helen Gillemot tonight, I knew. Just from the way he said it. And this time I’ve had enough. I’m not going through it all again.” She shut the machine and switched it on. “Blame the suitcase. It’s empowering. It’s given me confidence.”

The suitcase had been Ravenna’s idea. She’d talked about it as a joke: leaving is only a suitcase away.

continued on page 12

LEAVING IS JUST A SUITCASE AWAY

continued from page 11

Although she'd been deadly serious the day she discovered that Dilly had been cutting herself.

July was sweltering that year and Ravenna had talked her into coming for a dip in the condo's turquoise-tiled pool. Dilly was pulling herself up the ladder when Ravenna grabbed her arm and turned it over, exposing a network of lines and dots carved into the skin over the delicate blue veins of her inner forearm. Some were crusted over with recently dried blood. "Dilly! You're not—Tell me this isn't what I think! How on earth—"

She hadn't tried to pretend. "With a tomato knife."

That was during the summer of Sidney's first affair. She'd heard him on the phone late at night when it was too hot to sleep.

"How can you? Doesn't it hurt like mad?"

"It's a different kind of pain. One I have control over." Dilly's look was half-helpless, half-embarrassed. "It's actually exhilarating. In a strange kind of way." The

tomato knife was her favourite of all the knives she'd tried. Its serrated blade came to a sharp point you could use to puncture rather than slice. This made for less blood, less mess, and a pain you could bring to an exquisite pitch simply by boring deeper. More than once she'd come close to passing out. Afterwards she felt a curious sense of calm that floated her beyond the reach of Sidney's treachery.

"It's sick, is what it is," pronounced Ravenna. "You need help. Promise me you'll speak to a doctor? Better yet, a lawyer."

She hadn't done either. Dilly didn't want a doctor or a lawyer. She wanted her husband. The affair had run its course; four months later Sidney swore it was all a terrible mistake. The woman didn't matter, she was a server at a bar. It would never happen again and he pleaded with Dilly to forgive him. What else could she do? He was still the big overgrown boy she'd fallen for in high school. His receding hairline and expanding middle only made

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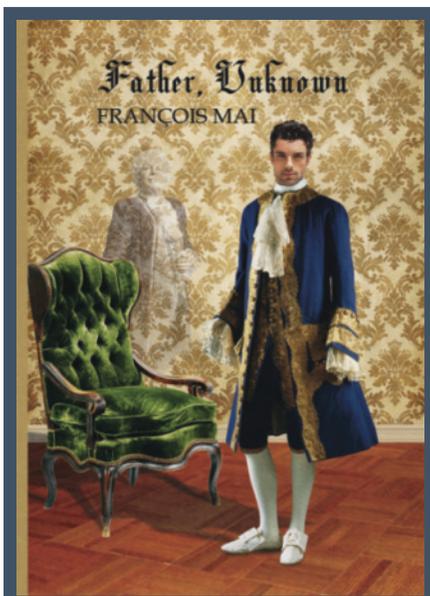
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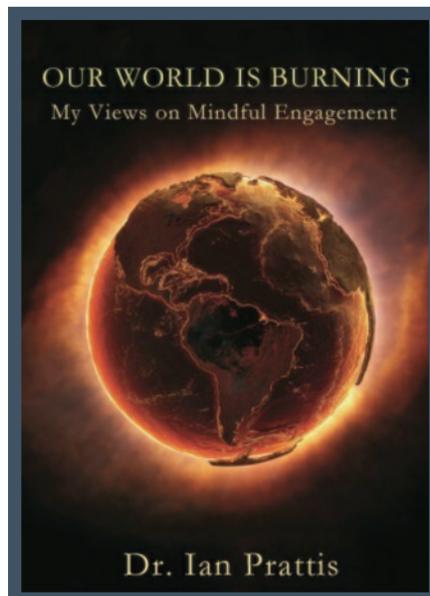


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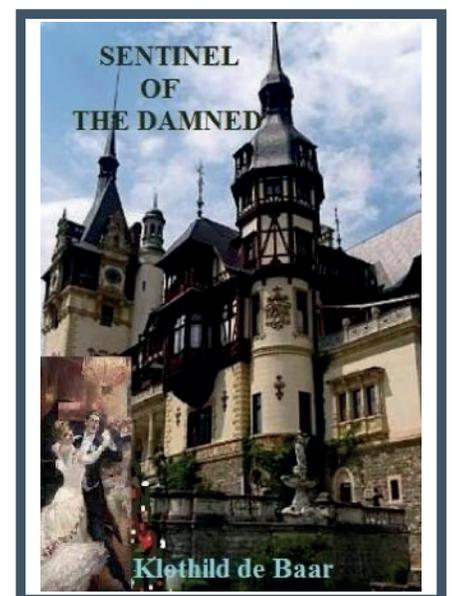
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LEAVING IS JUST A SUITCASE AWAY

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him seem, well – vulnerable somehow. Like a Teddy bear past his prime that she couldn't stop loving.

After that Ravenna kept a sharp eye on her arms and Dilly had to resort to other means to transform the nature of her pain. Drinking was an activity that left no outward scars. It got her through the time Sidney fell into the clutches of a well-heeled customer, a divorcee who owned a pied-a-terre in Florida as well as a cottage and a powerboat in Muskoka. The first weekend he stayed away he made up a story about attending the auto show in Detroit with Reg. Dilly had even half believed him – 'betrayal denial,' the psychologists called it on the Internet – until she ran into Lila Swan at the mall. "The auto show? No dear, you must have misunderstood. That's not till January."

Sidney maintained a well-stocked liquor cabinet for the get-togethers he liked to host, and Dilly had her choice of oblivion. She didn't care what she drank; she didn't really like the taste of any of it. She learned to go by the alcohol content marked on the label; the higher the percentage, the less she had to consume to get relief. The hurt and humiliation were never quite washed away, but they seemed to be happening to somebody else with whom she was only vaguely acquainted.

Still, she couldn't stay drunk twenty-four hours a day and she especially hated having to cook in a fog. The problem solved itself when the divorcee traded in her Lexus for a Mercedes and Sidney for a twenty-three year old salesman at the Mercedes dealer's. Much of this Dilly pieced together in roundabout ways, bit by bit. From Lila. From Visa bills for restaurants.

"What's this dinner with ice wine in Muskoka?" she'd called from the desk where she was doing the accounts.

"Big customer. Had to be wined and dined."

Then there'd been the spike in their phone bills. "Who did we call in Fort Lauderdale?"

"No idea. Must be a mistake."

"Kick him out," said Ravenna, over coffee at Tim Horton's.

"So he can move in with her? Besides – " Dilly's stubborn side asserted itself. She didn't want to grow old alone. "What would I do rattling around in the house on my own? I'll wait."

The bills stopped coming and Sidney took to moping. Dilly's desire to drink vanished; she found herself taking pleasure in cooking elaborate gourmet meals to make Sidney feel better. The way she explained it to Ravenna was, "Female customers just seem to come on to him. It's an occupational hazard."

But then last winter there'd been the girl with the two children. A single mom as they were called these days – women no longer being dignified with the appellation of mother – her plight must have roused some dormant instinct in Sidney. Dilly happened to spot them together at the public skating rink one morning when she was driving home from the dry cleaner's. Sidney was holding a little girl in pink tights in his arms. Ravenna, dropping by the house later, had discovered her friend in tears.

"It's my fault. Because I couldn't have children."

Ravenna had dragged her out to lunch, told her some home truths. "Children, my foot. It's women he's after. He'll never change. You've got to leave him. Start a new life of your own. Before you lose every last shred of self-respect," she lectured, while Dilly pushed a battered perch fillet around her plate, muttering that it lacked seasoning.

"But what would I do? At my age. How would I make a living?" In the dim past, she'd worked as a bookkeeper, but it was all data entry now and computers intimidated her.

"For heaven's sake! You're entitled to half of everything that's Sidney's."

"A kept woman?" Dilly wrinkled her nose. "I'd be bored out of my mind."

"Something that involves cooking, then. You've always said you'd like to do catering."

Dilly's tone was doubtful. "I know this woman in Toronto who runs a catering firm."

"So?" Ravenna's eyes flashed encouragement. "Remember, leaving is just a suitcase away."

A new life? Without Sidney? Cooking for money? Dilly had trouble getting her head around the idea; change on that scale required more confidence than she could muster. But the phrase Ravenna used stuck in her mind. "Leaving is just a suitcase away." What could be simpler?

That night, after Sidney called to say he had to work late, not to wait up, she made her way to the attic where they kept luggage from the early days of their marriage when they'd gone on holidays together. To Florida once,

LEAVING IS JUST A SUITCASE AWAY

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where Sidney developed a blistering sunburn chatting up overweight girls in bikinis. She picked out the medium-sized white suitcase which had been her favourite and carried it down to the spare room, where she stowed it in the closet. It felt like a momentous step, the first in a journey that might take her to deepest Africa, or the moon, or even eventually to her own catering business.

Every day after careful thought she selected one or two items and packed them, neatly pressed and folded, into the case: her good skirt, some flattering tops, a new nightgown. Her old photo album. With each addition, her anticipation grew, blurring the image of her husband with another woman's child in his arms.

In May, while they were buying steaks at Loblaw's for the first barbecue of the season, a couple of pre-schoolers acted out in the cookie aisle. "Spoiled brats, kids nowadays. Thank God we never had any," Sidney exclaimed in disgust over the shrieks, and Dilly knew the affair was over. She stopped packing things into the suitcase. But she didn't unpack anything either.

* * *

The doorbell rang just as she'd finished brushing her teeth. Hurriedly she pulled a robe over her nightgown.

"Mrs. Webster? Mrs. Sidney Webster?"

"Yes?" She could hardly bring out the word at the sight of the two official-looking faces under the visored police caps.

"May we come in?"

A male and a female constable, thought Dilly. The man to tell her the bad news, the woman to put an arm around her if she collapsed. That's how it happened on television. But she didn't collapse. She sat upright on a chair with her hands clasped in her lap and listened in stoic silence to the account of a driver running a red light.

"And my husband's – passenger?" she ventured at last. "Ms. Gillemot?"

The constables exchanged glances. "A few bruises, that's all. The young lady was lucky. The car was hit on the driver's side. We'll wait while you get dressed, shall we?" the woman added. "Give you a lift to the hospital."

Dilly stayed the six hours until Sidney had come through surgery and been transferred to Intensive Care. When she got home she climbed the stairs and went to the closet in

the spare room and took out the suitcase. Methodically she began to unpack and return everything to her dresser drawers. She'd never go to the moon now. Or to Toronto to do catering. It was much too soon of course, but the doctors were already preparing her for what lay ahead, and her brain whirled with wheelchairs and prosthetic devices.

Later on in the kitchen she made herself a cup of tea, and a cheese-and-tomato sandwich which she couldn't bring herself to eat. On the counter lay Mrs. Simon Kander's Settlement Cookbook – the first cookbook she'd ever owned – open at the section entitled Invalid Cookery.

But Dilly wasn't looking at that. She was looking at the tomato knife. Fall was coming and she'd soon be wearing long sleeves.



Canadian Authors Association National Capital Region

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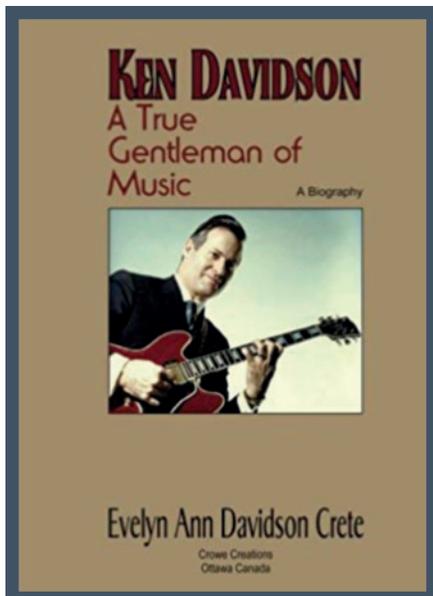
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