



Winter  
2017

# Byline

Canadian Authors Association  
National Capital Region

Vol 35:2 ISSN 1929-6193

## Why We Write

BY ARLENE SMITH

**A**T OUR NOVEMBER meeting, we took a few minutes at the beginning of our gathering to write down words that describe the writing experience. We wrote one word per slip of paper so we could create a Word Cloud that represented what writing is all about.

A few words showed the shadow side of writing.

**“Terror. Elusive. Hard Labour.”**

Those are the words we face on the days when we wake up thinking: What is the point? Why do I even torture myself with this?

The answers to those hard questions come through in the other words. Most of the writers chose that represent the joyful, soul-feeding side of writing.

**“Bliss. Delight. Fun. Solace. Wonder.”**

We write because it blows our minds, because it allows us to create, and because in some mystical way the solitary work of writing connects us with the universe. That’s why.

This winter may you choose to let the bliss outshine the shadow.



## Our Winter Social

Shake off the shivers at a warm gathering of friends and fellow writers.

**Saturday, December 9, 2017**

**2:00 to 5:00 p.m.**

At the home of Arlene Smith, with new (mostly complete) kitchen  
**POT LUCK**

Bring finger foods and your wonderful **SEASONAL** poems or short stories (shorter than 1000 words)

Share recent successes, view and purchase works of fellow writers, in time for gift-giving.

Good cheer! Good friends! Good food!

RSVP and get location details  
[somertonsmith@yahoo.com](mailto:somertonsmith@yahoo.com)



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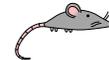


## The Christmas Mouse

A CHRISTMAS WHIMSY

BY SHARYN HEAGLE

*With apologies to either Clement Clarke Moore, or Henry Livingston, Jr., both of whom claim to have written “A Visit from St. Nicholas,” in the 1800s. The consensus went to Moore.*



'Twas the week before Christmas and all round the house,  
were tiny reminders of one tiny mouse.

The cupboards, the counters, the stove were, in essence,  
all littered with droppings, evidence of his presence.

For what I considered my own private home,  
he'd taken to raiding and marking his own.

But since 'tis the season, it seemed only fair,  
that peace, joy and good will should be his to share.

So filled with the spirit I started to place  
small morsels of cookies here, there, 'round the place.

Not plain ones nor humble, nor past best before,  
but yummy and royal iced. NOT from the store.

Day after day, in expanding good cheer,  
I left cookies more special. The best of the year.

My mind filled with fancies of wee Dad's returnings  
to his little family, quit proud of his earnings.

Gingerbread, shortbread and lemon delight.  
Such pleasures he shared with his family each night.

So the week passed, and as Christmas drew near, I once  
chanced upon him. It was really quite clear.

With waistline expanding and cheeks all apuff,  
this overindulgence was more than enough...

...To be quite unhealthy for his royal highness.  
My actions were killing him slowly, with kindness.

His blood sugar levels must be through the roof.  
His arteries clogging were obvious proof...

...I had to do something to call it a wrap.  
So Christmas Eve, kindly, I put out the trap.

# Upcoming Meetings

THE SECOND TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

7:15 P.M.

MCNABB COMMUNITY CENTRE, 180 PERCY STREET

## February 13, 2018

**THE EXAMINED LIFE: Understanding Ourselves Through Memoir**

**SPEAKER: Lee Ann Eckhardt Smith**

Far beyond the celebrity “tell-all,” a well-written memoir offers much to both the writer and the readers. A memoir can transform the pain of the past into clarity, and provide insight into an aspect of life, a time of life, or a certain place in time. Lee Ann will present options for themes and structures and tips for how writers can use techniques to keep the reader reading.

*Bio: Lee Ann Eckhardt Smith's workshop series for writers of family history and memoir, "Write It So They'll Read It" has been running in Ottawa, Perth, and other locations across Ontario since 2007. She is the author of two acclaimed non-fiction books, as well as numerous magazine and newspaper articles. Her website is [www.leeanneckhardtsmith.com](http://www.leeanneckhardtsmith.com).*

## March 13, 2018

**THE ARC OF DESIRE: Writing for the Stage**

**SPEAKER: Laurie Fyffe**

What makes a play different from other forms of writing? How do you get the characters to tell your story? And how does the playwright craft dialogue to serve both characters and plot? It's all 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 from 2014 to 2017 she was Managing Artistic Director of Ottawa StoryTellers.*

## April 10, 2018

**FROM PRINT TO FILM: Every Writer's Dream**

Dr. Ian Prattis will discuss the surprising manner in which the opportunity to turn one of his books into a movie came to him.

*BIO: Dr. Ian Prattis is Professor Emeritus at Carleton University in Ottawa, Zen teacher, peace and environmental activist. He is an award winning author of fifteen books. Recent awards include Gold for fiction at the 2015 Florida Book Festival (Redemption), 2015 Quill Award from Focus on Women Magazine (Trailing Sky Six Feathers) and Silver for Conservation from the 2014 Living Now Literary Awards (Failsafe: Saving the Earth From Ourselves). His book Redemption is being made into a movie.*

## May 8, 2018

**National Capital Writing Contest Awards**

**7:00 p.m.**

**Ottawa Public Library, Main Branch**

## June 12, 2018

**SUMMER MEETING**

**Details forthcoming**

### ***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](#).



Barbara Kyle's  
4th Annual  
Manuscript  
Evaluation Contest



***Win a Manuscript Evaluation: \$1,800 Value!***

*Free to Enter*

Want an expert critique of your manuscript? Then this contest is for you. It's open to anyone with a work of fiction or narrative non-fiction.

And here's the great thing. If you win, you'll have up to a year to send me your manuscript. If it's ready now, perfect. But if you need more time to complete it, that's fine too.

***Prizes***

Grand Prize: evaluation of a full manuscript: \$1,800 value

Second Prize: evaluation of the first 50 pages

Third Prize: evaluation of the first 25 pages

I'll choose the winners based on writing samples that suggest the writer's work has a good chance of succeeding in the publishing marketplace. My goal is to help you move forward in your writing career: to land that agent and sign that book deal.

The evaluation will be conducted in a discussion by phone or Skype: a 1.5-hour discussion for the Grand Prize winner; a half-hour discussion each for the Second Prize and Third Prize winners.

The evaluation will consist of my analysis of the manuscript's strengths and weaknesses regarding story structure, character development, dialogue, setting, style, and marketability.

***Contest Rules***

To enter, complete the online entry form and attach a writing sample (1,500 words maximum) from your work-in-progress or any previous work.

The deadline for entering is 12:00 midnight EST on December 15, 2017.

The three winners will be notified on January 3, 2018 and their names will be posted on my website and in my Newsletter for Writers.

Sound good? Go for it! To find out more — and to enter — click here.

Barbara Kyle

[bkyle@barbarakyle.com](mailto:bkyle@barbarakyle.com) [www.BarbaraKyle.com](http://www.BarbaraKyle.com)

# Don't miss out on our webinars!

- Free to members
- Available even if you have a calendar conflict

## Take the Fear Out of Formatting

How to Successfully Prepare Your Ebook for Publishing  
With Matthew Bin

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

7:00 to 8:30 pm EST

**Free** for members: Register through the [National Office](#) by clicking on the registration button in the Members Only section under Webinar Access.

COST: \$36 + HST

Affiliates: Get \$10 off with a promotion code

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Are you eager to publish an e-book but baffled on where to begin? Successfully publishing an e-book starts with formatting, which is nothing to be afraid of.

In this webinar, author and e-book consultant Matthew Bin will provide step-by-step instructions on how to prepare a manuscript for e-book publication. You will learn how to create a professional-looking and correctly formatted e-book that is compatible with all major e-publishing platforms, using only Microsoft Word and free tools available to everyone.

Not a computer whiz? No worries. To get the most out of this practical webinar, participants should simply be comfortable using an Internet browser (such as Microsoft Explorer, Google Chrome, or Safari) and be familiar with the basics of Microsoft Word.



*Matthew is a published author and owner of Calamus Consulting, a communications company that provides professional e-book services to authors. Matthew has published over 50 titles on Amazon and other e-book platforms and has learned how to navigate the e-book publishing process easily and efficiently.*

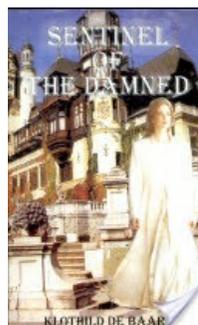
### CAA Social Media Expert in Residence

- 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](mailto: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.

# You May Not Need an Agent

BY BARBARA FLORIO GRAHAM



**M**OST AUTHORS DREAM about having an agent who will find a top publisher, negotiate a terrific contract, and provide guidance through a successful career.

Agents, unfortunately, can be as difficult to find as publishers, and the process of querying agents can be time-consuming and frustrating.

As with anyone you hire, if you think you need an agent, check them out thoroughly. They should have an excellent website detailing a solid track record, belong to The Association of Authors' Representatives (which prohibits charging reading fees), and specialize in the genre of your book.

But an increasing number of authors are hiring publishing consultants like me instead.

I identify the direction a book should take, help determine if the idea is viable or not, and then guide the author through the maze of publishing options. If the author comes to me early enough, I can help build a platform and create a website before approaching an agent or publisher. I also offer resources to self-publish.

My other strength draws on my expertise in marketing. Many authors just want to see the book published in some form, and don't realize that taking an active part in marketing and promotion is the only way the book is going to sell.

In the process of doing this over more than a decade, I became quite an expert on contracts.

Hiring a lawyer to negotiate a book contract can be time-consuming and costly. I offer a less expensive alternative, as I know which clauses can be modified and how to translate some of the complex legal language that can trap authors into being liable if the publisher is sued.

The first thing I tell authors is that every contract can be negotiated. Accepting the first contract offered is a common mistake, and something only an amateur would do.

That's what a good agent does as well. But I do this for a one-time fee, not a percentage of your

Sometimes those I mentor return to me for my comments on the contract offered. Others already have a publisher and don't understand some of the terms in the contract. That's why I charge an hourly rate, because every situation is different.

Whether you're searching for an agent or a publishing consultant, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- 1.** Avoid anyone who calls him or herself an agent unless they belong to The Association of Authors' Representatives. I have information about agents on the publishing resources page of my website. When you find an agent who seems to be a good fit, go to their website to see if they're accepting new authors. Then check what books they've recently represented, as this will give you an idea about the genres they've been successful with. How long has the agent been in business? Are there testimonials on the site?
- 2.** Engage in a series of emails before you sign anything. Ask specific questions, and understand how much you will be billed for their expenses, which often include photocopying, delivery fees, and telephone calls. Will you pay for the taxi and the meal if the agent takes a publisher to lunch?
- 3.** Agents earn a living by taking a percentage of authors' earnings. In many cases, this is 15%, but check the website to verify this, and also to see how these terms are worded. Does the agent get a percentage of this book alone, or for all your work as long as you're signed with them? Do you share earnings from anything related to this book as well, such as speaking fees, published excerpts, etc? How about your other work?
- 4.** Perform the same due diligence before you hire a book consultant. How long has this person been in business? Check out the books he or she has published, other publication credits, a solid website and a list of clients. Look for testimonials, and click on the URL attached to the name of those posting praise. Anybody can fake a glowing comment from "Jim in Ohio," but if the testimonial bears someone's full name and website URL, it's probably legitimate.

*continued on page 7*

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	<a href="#">Arlene Smith</a>
Membership	Christine Beelen
Programs	Position open
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Communications	<a href="#">Carol Stephen</a>
Writing Circles	
West End	<a href="#">Kit Flynn</a>

*Writers Helping Writers*



## AGENT

*continued from page 6*

You don't sign a contract with me, but rather begin the process of working together by sending me a check. I charge what I call a "set-up fee" to cover my initial work on your book and our correspondence before I actually begin. After that I charge by the hour. New clients are asked to pay for three hours in advance.

Some consultants provide editing, some sub-contract work to others, and others operate as project managers, "shepherding" your book from rough draft through print copies that arrive on your doorstep or an ebook on Amazon. But you'll pay dearly for this, so be careful!

Be very wary of someone who claims to be a "consultant" but is actually selling pay-to-print publishing services. The website will reveal this if you examine it carefully.

I'm the type of consultant who will offer suggestions about content and style, but not handle actual editing. I also don't oversee any book production. My role is just to advise, provide resources, and answer questions along the way, whether you decide to publish the book yourself or look for a publisher who won't charge you to produce your book.

I continue to be amazed at how brazen publishers can be. They ask authors to pay for all kinds of things that should be the responsibility of the company whose business it is to produce and sell books. Sadly, some authors are so hungry and naïve that they will agree to just about anything.

So do you need an agent? Perhaps, or maybe you need a publishing consultant. At the very least, you probably need someone who knows the ropes to review your contract before you sign.



*BIO: Barbara Florio Graham is a publishing consultant and marketing strategist. The author of three books, Five Fast Steps to Better Writing (20th anniversary edition), Five Fast Steps to Low-Cost Publicity, and the award-winning Mewsings/Musings, she served as Managing Editor for Prose to Go: Tales from a Private List.*

*Her website, <http://SimonTeakettle.com>, contains a great deal of free information, including resources for writers and publishers, contract advice, and many pages of interesting facts about science, history, food, animals, culture and inventions.*

# Historical Novels for Young Adults

Notes From Our November Meeting Featuring Ruth Latta

BY CHRISTINE BEELEN

OTTAWA-BASED AUTHOR RUTH Latta shared her insights on writing historical novels for the Young Adult market at the November 14<sup>th</sup> of the Canadian Authors' Association – National Capital Region. Ruth has an Ontario Teachers' Certificate, holds a B.A. (1970) and M.A., History (1973) from Queen's University and a B.A. in English 1993 from the University of Waterloo. Ruth taught elementary school before heading off to work as a history researcher and project manager.

With more than a dozen books published by Ottawa-area small presses, Ruth was able to provide our audience with a good overview of the requirements of writing good historically-accurate novels. One of the important points she made is to

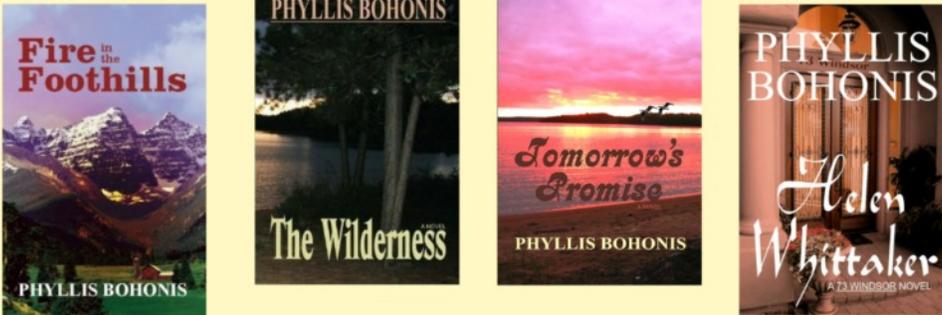
remember “things were done differently then.” Make sure of your details. Several of her Young Adult novels appeal to a wider audience because of the topics and details she makes sure are correct.

Ruth makes good use of the Internet, library and archival materials to check not only the facts of the individuals but also the environment in which they lived. She suggested that writers should be aware of other stories on a similar vein. Read biographies, histories, anything that would give you detail about the same period in which you are setting your story. You might want to visit the location if it is key to telling your story. Are there descendants? You might want to contact them if you are writing about a real person. In her stories, she tries to do more

showing than telling by using family anecdotes.

While you want to make sure the history of the period comes through, you should avoid “information dumps” that can turn readers off. Providing a separate history lesson slows the reading down and can create a bump in the storyline. She suggests providing the information through the story on a need to know basis, dramatizing the real events, or creating a knowledgeable character who can discuss the historical events through dialogue. You can also use an “Afterward” to outline what was fact and what was fiction so you can explain how you deviated or expanded the truth in your version of events.

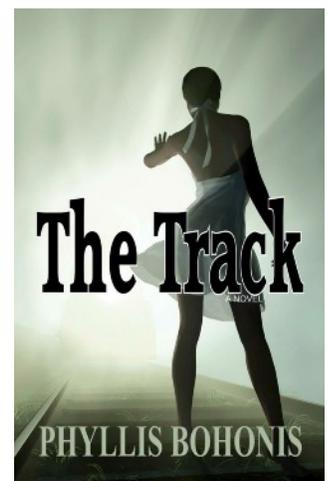
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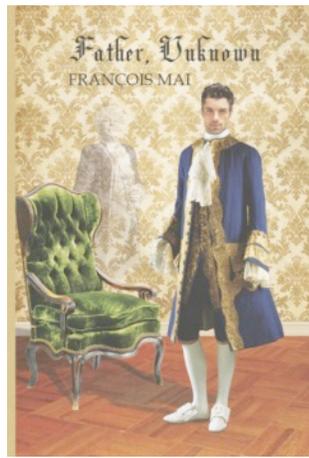
## HISTORICAL WRITING

*continued from page 8*

You also need to pay attention to terminology, using words that are authentic to the time period. In early Canadian history, for example, people were Subjects of the Queen not Citizens of Canada!

Ruth brought along several of her books including one about to be released, titled "Grace and the Secret Vault" set in 1919, the story deals with the Winnipeg General Strike. She used one of her previous books she had written with Joy Trott, a biography of Grace MacInnis as the historical background for a fictional story about a young girl helping her family. She also generously gifted some copies of her previous titles to members of the audience.

Since 1985, Ruth has taught courses in creative writing and memoir writing in local schools, community centres, and libraries. She also writes short fiction, poetry, reviews and articles for magazines. More information can be found on Ruth's website: [ruthlatabooks.blogspot.ca](http://ruthlatabooks.blogspot.ca) 



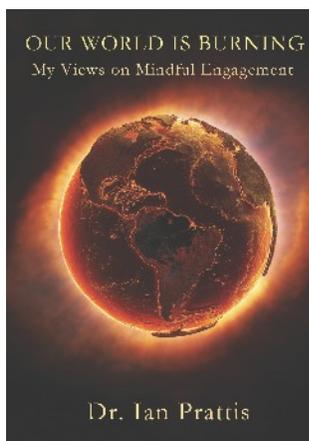
### Book Launch

*Father Unknown*  
By FRANÇOIS MAI

Thursday, November 30  
6-8 p.m.

Books on Beechwood  
35 Beechwood Ave.  
613-792-5030

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



### 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*

Guess what these numbers add up to!

$$31 = 11/1/17 + 2/3/18$$

That's right! The **31st Annual National Capital Writing Contest (NCWC)**

Deadline is February 2, 2018

Sponsored by Canadian Authors Association–National Capital Region

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

Poetry: Maximum 60 lines including title and blank lines, unpublished, in English. No Haiku.

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

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

Open to all Canadian writers.

Submissions may be sent via regular mail or submitted online.

<https://canadianauthors.org/nationalcapitalregion/contests/>

# The Flower Seller of Agra

BY SHIELA JANE

**M**Y NAME IS Anjuli. I sell flowers on the road that leads to the Taj Mahal. In the morning, when there are fewer tourists, I sit in the sand and look at that new white palace shining in the sun, and remember. I am an old woman now, and penniless, but once I lived in the Court of Kings.

That was the Golden Age, a time when the Empire was blessed beyond all other countries of the world, when the line of the Mughal emperors was strong, and the people of India were happy. Love made it so.

The prince Khurram – Shah Jahan, as he was later known – was betrothed to Arjumand when she was just fourteen. Yet for years, he had not seen her. Then one morning he chose to walk in the market square and chanced upon his bride to be, bargaining the price of silks like a common housewife. I was her servant. I was with her that day and saw him looking at us as we laughed and talked with the vendors and the shoppers. He followed us home and kept watching from the garden. As I removed her veil, the breeze coming in through the windows blew her long hair into her eyes, and she brushed her hand through it. It was like a raven unfolding its wings for flight. I saw that Khurram could not take his eyes off her.

That evening, he sent his man to bring her to him. The valet came to me and I told Arjumand that the prince desired her presence and had sent her a

nightingale as a gift. She looked at the bird in its golden cage and said, “Am I to be like this poor creature?” Then she took it out of the cage and let it fly through the open window.

The valet went back without the bird and without Arjumand. I trembled at the thought of the prince’s anger, feared for my lady’s life...and her servant’s as well. Soldiers would be at the door at any moment, I expected.

But it was Jahan himself who came. He stepped into the drawing room that was so dainty and feminine, like Arjumand herself, and overwhelmed it with his energy. He bowed to my mistress and said, “You released my nightingale, yet *I* am the captive one.” Then he kissed her hand and knelt at her feet.

From that day, she was destined to be the jewel in Jahan’s crown. He married her and called her Mumtaz Mahal. He was besotted with his new wife. Two other wives he had already, and children; they were all but forgotten. Everything he did now became an offering to this new wife, this *girl*, who commanded his life with nothing more than a smile. The building of massive forts, changes to the court, even military conquests – everything he did was *for* her.

I lived with her at the Royal Court. We were much the same age and as like as twin sisters in feature, although so different in fact. It is a mysterious thing, beauty. How the same eyes, the same mouth, the same curve of face and slightness of build can

*First Place  
Short Story  
2017  
NCWC*

translate into such unique aspects in two different women, how what is so plain in one can be illuminated somehow into true loveliness in the other. Mumtaz was the perfect pearl created by a divine hand. I was simply the reflection in the mirror.

My duties were not onerous. I was her companion, her confidante, and in some ways her protector. For life at court was not peaceful. There was fury among the rest of the royal family at being deposed from Jahan’s affections so thoughtlessly.

As I quickly learned, political wives wield their power in subtle ways – through quiet alliances, by currying the affection of servants, and with maternal influence.

Mumtaz was shunned by many, but her love for Jahan kept her head high. When he was at the palace, no one could touch her. But when he was away...oh then, the blades were sharpened more openly. There was one in particular who watched with needles in her eyes - Nur, a wife of Jahan’s father, Jahangir, and the real power behind the throne.

“I fear her, Anjuli,” Mumtaz said to me many times. “She knows that Jahan is strong and will one day soon become King, and then her power will be gone. She will do anything to stop me

*continued on page 11*

from replacing her as the chosen queen.”

I soothed her, saying, “My lady, you’re tired and imagining things. No one could wish you ill.” But I knew as she did that Nur was dangerous.

Still, the love of Jahan and my mistress became stronger year by year and they had many children together. He could not keep away from her it and no sooner did Mumtaz bring forth one baby than its successor was on the way. As their family grew, so did Jahan’s power and accomplishments in the battle field. He began to be restless to take his father’s place as the supreme ruler, and on many occasions, the voices of the two men could be heard raised in anger over some disagreement.

One day when Mumtaz was nearing the birth of yet another child, she walked with me by the stone palace wall. We talked of her hope that this latest confinement would produce a son again, and of how Jahan was even now impatient to return to her bed. We reached the steep staircase carved into the wall leading to the garden and paused to look down at the lilies and bougainvillea blooming below.

“I will pick the best for you,” I said and ran down to gather the flowers.

Just as I reached the cool grass, there was a cry from above, not a long scream, just a sharp shriek like that of a fox run to ground. I turned to see Mumtaz tumbling down the rough sandstone steps towards me.

I must have fainted, because all I remember of the rest of that night is the sense of pain and grief. For the baby was lost. Even now, so many years later, I mourn for the precious life that never was. There were other babies that did not live, but it is that one I dream of, it is that one that I’m remembering when I wake sometimes in the middle of the night with tears flowing down my cheeks.

Jahan was beside himself. Not just because of the miscarriage, but because Mumtaz clung to him that night, weeping and repeating over and over, “Khurram...she did it. She pushed me, tried to *kill* me! I cannot go on like this.”

There was no real proof that the fall was caused by Nur’s hand. But it was enough for Jahan that Mumtaz said it to be the truth. And when Jahangir angrily dismissed the suggestion, the rift between father and son became war. What happened then is now part of the history of the Empire.

Nur was cunning enough to know that if she lost this battle, she would lose her very freedom. Under the guise of wifely advice, she marshaled the Mughal forces against Jahan in the most ferocious manner and though his men fought bravely they were vanquished.

It was only by the grace of Jahangir that Jahan and my lady were spared the sword. Yet Nur was not satisfied. She began a new and devastating campaign – a secret friendship with their third son, Aurangzeb, who was now a young man.

What devilish ideas she put into his head, turning him against his own parents and older brothers with promises of wealth and power far beyond his natural claim. If only Jahan had taken more interest in his children’s progress. If only Mumtaz had remained at home with them instead of accompanying her beloved husband on his travels. If only...

\* \* \*

The end of the love story came with little warning. Jahan had finally become the Emperor following the death of his father and had immediately imprisoned Nur. In 1631, he was fighting a campaign in the Deccan Plateau and Mumtaz was with him, and with child again. I was there too by her side. She was happier than she had ever been now that her sworn enemy had been declawed. Or so she thought.

When the birthing pains began, I held Mumtaz’s hands and we prayed together. As we were kneeling on the mat, a water girl came and touched my shoulder.

“A man is here,” she whispered. “He looks like a beggar, but his speech is like a noble. And he came by horse. He asks for an urgent audience with the Queen about her son.”

I was shaking my head but Mumtaz heard and said, “What is that? What son? Bring him!”

The water girl went away and came back with a tall turbaned young man. He was clearly exhausted and covered in the dust of travel. One sleeve was torn and the arm underneath

*continued on page 12*

**THE FLOWER SELLER OF AGRA**  
*continued from page 11*

was wrapped in a stained and torn bandage.

He practically fell at my feet—at Mumtaz’s feet—and cried, “My Queen, a thousand pardons for disturbing your peace. But there is great danger on the way. My name is Nawaz. I am a guardian of the palace. I have word from the prison that your son, Aurangzeb, has been plotting with Queen Nur against Shah Jahan. They plan to take over the Peacock Throne and kill both Jahan and you, while you are here, far away from the court. Aurangzeb sent this message to his Horse Master but I intercepted it.” He held out his hand and showed her a waslis, a parchment with the words in calligraphy faint but legible.

Mumtaz crumbled before my eyes. She would not have believed it of her own son, but the words were there in the hand of a court calligrapher, the directives to the Horse Master a proof she could not dismiss. She would have fallen with shock and the pain of the babe about to be born if Nawaz had not caught her.

We placed her on her bed and I sent Nawaz away. I could not stop crying at the thought of what Nur had brought about, the bitterness that she had cultivated so long and so carefully in Aurangzeb. So artfully she would have suggested Jahan’s favoritism towards his older sons and the supposed injustices done to Nur herself. So subtly, she must have dropped veiled hints of Mumtaz’s infidelities and her belief that he, Aurangzeb, was the true heir to the throne.

“It will not end until death itself ends it,” I said.

Mumtaz knew it was the truth. She had intelligence, if I may be permitted to say that myself. Intelligence and a will that matched that of her archenemy, Queen Nur. In that long night while she laboured to give life to her child, she also gave birth to a plan.

She held my hands and said over and over. “It is because of me that Nur has done this, because of her hatred and jealousy. She can stop Aurangzeb but she won’t do it until I am dead. That is the only thing that will cool her anger.

“Anjuli, you can see that, can’t you? You understand. If I were to die tonight, the country would go into mourning. Jahan would halt the campaign and return to the palace. Aurangzeb and Nur could get away with assassinating him on the battlefield, but not while he is surrounded by a wall of supporters and loyal subjects. Their plot would be found out and they themselves would be put to death. You must help me, Anjuli, *tonight*. For Jahan’s sake, you must do as I ask.”

The rest you know through the history books. Mumtaz Mahal did die that night...in childbirth...at least that is what the court scribes wrote. There are...were...only a few people who knew the truth. Most have gone to the holy place by now.

The doctor who prepared her body, the trusted servants who covered her face in the burial shroud, the one who opened the gate for me when I left in the early hours of morning, I swore them all to secrecy. Jahan himself never knew. His grief is there for the world to see in the white tomb that is his finest achievement.

Now, so many years later, Jahan himself is gone. Aurangzeb is Emperor. And I? I sit here in the sand selling flowers and look upon the Taj Mahal. In the moonlight, it glows with the sheen of a pearl.

Mumtaz had intelligence and strong will, as I have said. But in the end, she did not have the courage.

No! Just this once, let me speak as myself, as the Queen I once was. *I did not have courage.* Try to understand when I say, I loved my little Anjuli. She was my dearest friend. I did not *want* to do what I did. Yet, when the time came to make that final sacrifice, I was afraid. I could not let go of life. Instead I exchanged one life for another. She was terrified, but I told her she would live forever in the world beyond this one. It was her duty to obey. We wept together even as I held the soft woolen blanket over her face.

So that night, my little servant girl – the reflection of the jewel in the mirror – *became* the perfect pearl. She is there still in the tomb Jahan built for me, that memorial to eternal love.

And now...my name is Anjuli. I am a flower seller. But once, I lived in the Court of Kings. 

*BIO: Shiela Jane was born in Mumbai, India and lived there for many years before moving to Canada. She has a degree in political science and diploma in journalism and also studied creative writing. Her poetry and short stories have been published in a variety of magazines and anthologies and her first novel, The Saltwater Ghost, was released in 2013. In addition to fiction writing, she has worked as a freelance journalist, communications writer, policy specialist and college instructor*

# Anne from Toronto

By Ruth Latta

You came to us from Toronto.  
You wore a red suit and matching lipstick  
on a mouth too mobile  
for a Mona Lisa smile.

In 1959,  
when your high boots  
first scaled our snowbanks  
you must have been all of twenty-four.

On winter mornings,  
in that refrigerator of a school bus  
I played a movie in my head  
with kings and queens of England  
swishing their ermine robes  
or clanking their armour -  
images you created in thin air.

I yearned to be you,  
full of spirit, self-esteem.

Teachers from "away"  
never stayed long.  
Far too soon,  
you caught the Ontario Northland  
back to Toronto and your fiance.

Anne, I know now  
that those china poodles I gave you  
as a farewell gift were awful,  
but they were the only thing in the store  
that remotely suited your glamour.

I think now of your cigarettes  
stained with cupid's bows  
and shake my head.  
In those days,  
we fools thought smoking was  
sophisticated.

Wherever you are,  
you probably still wear  
your wide red smile.

**Second Place  
2017  
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**POETRY**

*BIO: Ruth Latta's new book is Grace  
and the Secret Vault (Ottawa, Baico,  
2017) For more information about  
her writing visit*

<http://ruthlatta.blogspot.ca> and  
<http://ruthlatabooks.blogspot.ca>

# Distant Connections

BY JULIO HELENO GOMES

THE WOODEN DOOR creaks open and the room is shrouded in gloom but for dusty streaks breaking through the slats of the shutters. A tang of liniment and sweat hangs in the air. A small bed is jammed at the far wall, a pierced Jesus looking down. Under a tattered quilt lies my dying grandmother.

“Come in. Don’t make too much noise,” my aunt commands, ushering us into the musty room.

My father, never at ease in situations that require displays of affection, steps in uncertainly. My mother shepherds my siblings as if they’re about to view a freak show exhibit, which it could be with our Avó, a shrunken figure stretched formlessly under the covers, grey hair sprayed across a stained pillow, a bird-like hand resting on a frayed edge of the quilt. She seemed as near to death as life.

We gather round the low bed, my father staring at the mother he hasn’t seen in years. My mother’s hands rest on the shoulders of Sara, who looks on in discomfort, and Carlitos, who glances curiously around the spartan room, reflexively sticking a thumb in his mouth though he long outgrew the habit. I lurk behind my mother as my aunt shuffles along the gap between the bed and the plaster wall, reaching to open the shutters over the bed.

“Ela não se sentindo bem,” she informs us, unnecessarily, in Portuguese, that her mother hasn’t been feeling well. “Mãe,” she grunts, leaning in to shake her by the shoulder. “Mãe!”

Honourable  
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Short Story

My mother scowls at my unheeding father, then moves forward and gently takes the bony hand clutching the quilt and strokes it.

“Natividade,” she whispers, running a hand over my grandmother’s shadowed face.

She finally turns to us, eyes shining behind fluttering lids. She trembles and a dry cough racks her body. Her fingers snatch at my mother’s wrist.

“Está tudo aqui,” Avó sputters between coughs, wearily looking about. “Eu sabia.”

Yes, she knew we would come, all of us. What else could we do when the unusual phone call came, saying Mother’s been sick for a while now, very sick, and this time the end is surely near, she is being summoned to her Saviour. Such words when relayed to we the children in far-off Canada rang oddly. Avó never struck me as the religious type despite the Jesus statue over the bed or a name that evoked Christmas cheer and the love of the Virgin Mary. Our visits to the old country I remembered as awkward encounters with Natividade, though my mother would tell us that our departing would result in a barrage of lament. “Oh, me,” Avó would weep to my father, in bitterness and recrimination, “I’ll never see you or

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## BYLINE Magazine

### Call for Submissions

*Byline* is a quarterly publication of the National Capital Region Branch of the Canadian Authors Association.

Articles on the process of writing, writing tips, interviews, literary events and member achievements welcome.

### Deadlines:

Fall Issue: August 15  
Winter Issue: November 15  
Spring Issue: February 15  
Summer Issue: May 15  
Send submissions to [Byline](#)

these precious children again. They'll forget about me just as you have forgotten about us." Funny, such emotion from a woman who gave affection as easily as she handed out coins for the grandkids to buy candy. Which is to say, not much.

So the trip back home, undertaken in haste this time, looked likely to settle into a grim countdown to last rites for the old lady.

"What is the matter with her?" Sara said with a sour turn of her mouth after we were shooed away from the cramped room so father could spend quiet time with his mother, who we were informed by my aunt may not make it another day.

"It's her heart, dear," my mother said soothingly, taking Carlitos by the hand.

"What heart problem? She's probably got pneumonia," I said. "Or is it bronchitis? Emphysema? Sounds like no one knows."

"Antonio, she have the problems with 'er heart. For many years now," my mother replied, irked by something more than the skepticism of unsympathetic teenagers.

"How come she's not in the hospital?" my sister persisted.

"Doctors do nothing," my mother replied, her halting English faltering. "Too much antibioticos. She have the chest problem now, she be old seventy years and not young woman. Be nice to your Avó."

Sara and I exchanged knowing glances. We'd heard this before and knew what it meant. A vigil for the three weeks we were booked to be here, trooping in every day to pay our respects to the old woman, now a bundle of brittle bones lying in the grim room at the back reserved for the unwanted and the unwell, where her own husband had been banished years ago when cancer started to eat away his life.

The gaggle of cousins next door offered a break from the tedium. The boys and I would trudge up to the sandy soccer field and boot a ragged ball around or we'd race from the school building back to our house, the winner promised a swig from the bottles of Wiser's De Luxe my father had brought to share with his brother. Invariably I would win but would decline the prize. I preferred sumol, the orange fruit drink, so the cousins would gleefully help themselves to the whiskey bottle.

My siblings cavorted with the girls, dashing through the crumbling barn and hay shed, chasing chicks and alarmed hens around the straw-covered courtyard or pulling tabbies out from under the crooked stools where they had been curled up, brushing their backs in careless strokes. Then my aunt would emerge from the main house, drying her rough hands on the ever-present apron (she had a dozen of them and they were every shade of black), and bark at one of her daughters to go and check on Avó, who in turn would grumble and direct another sibling to go, a routine which concluded with the youngest trampling hesitantly into the old house to make sure grandmother was still in this world.

At least once on the trip my father would get itchy feet and rent an exotic car and in his shilly-shally shifting would send us hurtling along twisting, oak-fringed roads, stopping at sacred springs, untended shrines and obscure chapels so my mother could kneel reverently before dim altars, sighing Ave Marias and Our Fathers, beseeching Jesus, as well as the apostles and all the saints, to bless poor Natividade and release her from her earthly suffering.

"Tozé," my mother said one evening as she carried platters of barbecued chicken and roasted potatoes to the dinner table, using my pet name. "I promise your Avó I make caldo verde for her. It be 'er favourite. You take to her some? Your tia said this be good time she eat."

I rolled my eyes. Knowing a protest would be pointless I took the bowl and trudged next door. I nudged my way through the high metal gates into the silent courtyard and entered the old house, past the soot-blackened old kitchen, and into the sick room.

"Avó, caldo verde. É para você," I said as I entered, presenting the bowl as if a peace offering.

She was sitting up and looked at me, unmoving, like a wax figure. I sighed, took the cloth and tucked it under her chin, stirred the potato purée and shredded cabbage soup and began feeding her small portions. After a half-dozen spoonfuls, she shook her head and said, "Não quero mais." That was enough.

I put the spoon down, took the cloth and dabbed her lips, then lifted a cup of water from which she

*continued on page 16*

sipped before slowly shifting back into the pillows, still crumpled and stained.

Well, I've done my good grandson deed, I thought. I grabbed the bowl, collected the spoon and turned without a word or backward glance.

"Antonio José," I heard.

It came as a hacking croak but it was a definite address. On the few occasions she spoke directly to me, she was deliberate in using the names that had been entered in the parish registry, the only one, besides my aunt, who persisted with that formality.

"Did I ever tell you," she said in a low but steady voice, "about me and your grandfather?"

I didn't know what she meant since I knew so very little of their life. "Não," I said with no interest.

She turned her head to indicate a cane chair behind the door. I put the bowl and spoon on the bedside table, went to the chair, carried it up to the bed and sat, my hands folded in my lap, waiting. I watched the dust motes dance as the faint sunlight flickered through the shutters.

She wasn't from these parts, you understand. She grew up a ways away in a fishing village east of the capital (which I think explains the singsong enunciation in her syllables). Her father was um pescador, her mother a fishmonger's wife. The bounty of the sea was all they knew, both the fish from the deep and from the rocky waters past the harbour, the waters that glided up the beach, the beach of the softest sand, where up would go a magnificent hotel, to stand like a palace over the bay.

It was here as a young woman, still almost a child, she broke from the tradition of her family and went to work as a maid, changing bedsheets, dusting and sweeping rooms occupied by foreign nobles and the Americans who became rich from that great war. But she still had chores each morning at the dock helping her mother sort the catch her father had taken into his dory. It was a sturdy twenty-footer that would go beyond the horizon and the safety of the coast, in every kind of weather, bringing back baskets filled with haddock, hake, tuna and occasionally — oh, what a treat! — octopus or red lobster.

She had two older brothers and they had their own fine barco, but it could not compare with

father's. One morning she went to meet her father's boat and along with Senhor Rodrigo there was someone else on board. A young man with a thin curl of a moustache like the movie star, not Valentino or Gable but William Powell, and his eyes would sparkle when he told a story, which tended to be amusing though sometimes it was crude, told in no hurry as he tapped tobacco from a small pouch and into the white paper, pausing to roll it and run his tongue along the edge before putting it between his lips and striking a match.

He was José, come from the land of the great pine forests, looking to make a mark in the City of Light, at the mouth of the mighty river, as those sad songs tell us, from whence great adventurers set out on their voyages of discovery all those years ago, bidding adeus to stone-faced mothers and fearful brides. Of ocean fishing José knew very little and clearly it was not suited to his temperament or ambition. It was only because of the unsurpassed beauty of Captain Antonio's daughter that he endured the early morning sailings, the bitter winds, and the calluses and sore muscles the heavy oars and seaweed-soaked nets produced. I will walk through fire for you, he once said — that and many other sweet words when he came by the modest house to share in the meal of sardinhas her mother would grill in the afternoon along with her special cornmeal bread, drinking the vinho verde brought by Senhor Rodrigo.

Natividade, the only daughter and so it must be her father's favourite child and her mother's constant companion, deserved better than the adoration of un vagabundo from the north who was so lacking in talent he had to sign on for the muscle-straining, soul-sapping monotony of trolling the waves for profit, as her mother would comment while they sat by the open fire knitting the caps, shawls and sweaters to sell at the monthly fair. Better to stay at that castle on the beach and clean the chamber pots of those who are so rich you are like the furniture to them, though one to whom they might leave the occasional réis as thanks for a job well done, she advised quietly, for her mother was a woman of great piety and only raised her voice when competing at the fish market.

## DISTANT CONNECTIONS

continued from page 16

Life on the deep waters is, é verdade, humdrum and hard work. You must have a keen eye to the danger that can come like the wolf from distant clouds and the gathering breeze. So it was one November morning as the boat was out beyond the cape that a storm arose before the sun had properly kissed the cliffs. An old hand on these sometimes impetuous seas, her father was still caught out by the suddenness of the storm. His brute strength and guile was not enough against the fury of that mad wind, the waves it inspired, and the freezing rain. They struggled like brave Odysseus to turn for home but the boat was swamped, the boom of the sail broken like a dry branch, the oars plucked from their hands. A swell of clashing waves turned them sideways and smashed the boat on the rocks. Father and Senhor Rodrigo were taken by the merciless water.

José ended up on a large outcropping, a wicker fishing basket held tightly to his chest, shivering in cold and fear, one arm broken and his skin scraped from bootless foot to head. He was found at dusk by her brothers, the only thing that was saved from that storm. And when a respectable period of mourning had passed he vowed never to step off solid ground and that he was done with this village and the meagre life of fishing. What future did a heartbroken Natividade have but to accept his offer of marriage and leave her world

behind for a future that if it would not be better could not be worse?

“Do you understand?” she asked me weakly.

“Yes,” I said gravelly and we looked at each other, saying nothing but much passing between us.

It would transpire that tragedy would not be a thing in their past. Their first children were twin boys, such a unique event it was hailed as a blessing. They were christened Antonio and José. They died in infancy, of scarlet fever, when a sick Natividade was breast feeding.

The mantle was passed on to me, my mother would explain years later, the first of all the grandchildren and named in this fashion so my father might get out from under the shadow that hung over his father and the two boys and two girls that followed, a gift to his mother that seemed never to have been accepted. But I now know that, like the ghost of her long lost father, that too has at last been laid to rest.

*BIO: A long-time resident of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Julio has been a practising journalist for more than 25 years. His interests are reading, writing, movies, music, theatre and sports. Julio can be contacted at [julio.writer@tbaytel.net](mailto:julio.writer@tbaytel.net)*

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## JUST RELEASED

### *Father, Unknown*

by Francois Mai

Marcel Juin is on his deathbed surrounded by his wife and three adult children. Though aware of his illegitimacy they do not know he harbours another secret.

Set in the neighbouring towns of Vimy and Arras, the novel portrays the dramatic psychological, medical, religious and political conflicts of the era and the dire effects on the lives of the characters.

Marcel outwardly lives a conventional and prosperous existence but endures painful inner conflicts that arise from not knowing his paternal origins. The narrative portrays his various, and often frustrating attempts to cope with this.

<http://austinmacauley.com/book/father-unknown>

### *Our World Is Burning: My Views on Mindful Engagement*

by Dr. Ian Prattis

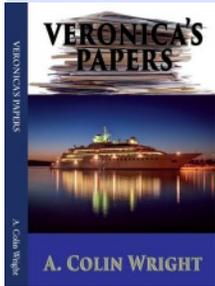
This book examines our fragile future and offers an alternative way of living based on Mindful Engagement.

In sixteen essays Ian Prattis offers examples of how to respond to the serious social, economic, environmental and personal challenges of the Twenty-First century. He advocates mindfulness practice to cultivate awareness as an ethical framework to guide actions, to create steadiness and equanimity, and to replenish body, mind and spirit. This book offers a lightning bolt that will singe incredulity and cynicism.

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

## Veronica's Papers

BY A. COLIN WRIGHT



Gerald Clayton, suffering from amnesia, receives a package of papers from Veronica, a former clinical hypnotist. She tells him they accomplished his fantasy of gathering together, on the ship *Marguerite*, his past loves with the two of them present, but in disguise.

In hopes of discovering his own past. Gerald invites the passengers to share in a mystery by guessing what, or whom, they all have in common.

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