

WORD MAGAZINE

2023



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Writer's Story

Writing Process

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Creative Non-Fiction

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A Perspective

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Battling Writer's Block

AND MORE!



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a better
everyday
for our
people.



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WORD Magazine is an annual publication created by and for the membership of the WritersNL, as such the magazine serves to educate and entertain members with non-fiction articles and advertisements of resources valuable to the local writing community.

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Editor

Stacey Oakley

Committee

Alisha Morrissey, Andrew Peacock, Carolyn Parsons, Jillian Morgan, Modeline Longjohn, Stacey Oakley

Layout

Wendy Rose

Printer

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WritersNL

202-223 Duckworth Street, St. John's
Newfoundland and Labrador, A1C 6N1
(709) 739 5215 | Toll free: 1 (866) 739 5215
www.writersnl.ca | info@writersnl.ca

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LEFT – President Ainsley Hawthorn (middle) claps for a shortlisted NL Book Award reader.
RIGHT – Executive Director Jen Winsor speaks at the 2022 NL Book Awards.

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

By Ainsley Hawthorn, WritersNL President

It's a moment of transition in the writing field.

Since the last edition of WORD, OpenAI released ChatGPT, introducing the public to a powerful new generation of artificial intelligence that can not only analyze our writing but generate its own.

The effect on the writing industry was immediate. Copywriting work has dwindled in favour of AI-produced content. Clarkesworld magazine closed to new submissions after its editors were bombarded with AI-written fiction. Some authors with large followings have found AI-created books for sale on Amazon under their names.

Meanwhile, Access Copyright, which collects royalties on behalf of Canadian authors, has announced they're downsizing after unsuccessfully lobbying the federal government for a decade to institute stronger protections for intellectual property. Having witnessed a 79% drop in author royalties since 2012, the organization can no longer sustain itself and will have a reduced capacity to fight for copyright protections for creators.

In the entertainment industry, the Writers Guild of America just emerged from a strike lasting almost five months. Among WGA's chief concerns was the way streaming platforms like Netflix have changed the industry, employing fewer writers and limiting the residuals they receive from shows that become smash hits.

It feels like the chips have been thrown in the air and we have yet to see where they will fall, but perhaps it was ever thus.

Were writers of the past any less daunted by the shift from clay and stylus to pen and ink? By the invention of the printing press? By the introduction of the paperback?

Every writing revolution has been attended not only by losses but also by gains. Take digital publishing, which has gone from an existential threat lamented as the "twilight of the books" to a thriving new marketplace that provides a viable self-publishing alternative for writers. Without digital self-publishing, unexpected runaway successes like *50 Shades of Grey* and *The Martian* would never have found their readerships.

WANL – or should I say WritersNL – has undergone its own transformation this year as we launched our new name, motto, and logo. In the 36 years since our founding, we've constantly strived to become more accessible to writers at all levels, from all backgrounds, working in all genres, and living in all regions of the province. We wanted our name to capture this welcoming and inclusive spirit.

Updating our look also reflects our commitment to keep growing with the writing community, to offer timely professional development opportunities, to respond to members' changing needs, and to support local writers through every disruption and evolution our art form and our industry undergo.

Most of all, the name WritersNL is a reminder that this organization belongs to all of us, its members, the writers of the province, and that, whatever changes are to come, we will face them together. ♣



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Stacey Oakley, Chair of the 2023 WORD Committee

Anyone expecting significant words of wisdom from an experienced editor of magazines is in the wrong place.

I would even argue that there's far more wisdom to be found in the rest of WORD and what other authors have written than I am putting in here. I am an independent author and publisher of novels, not magazines, so this was a whole new territory for me.

However, I love trying to climb a learning curve, and luckily we have a committee of strong voices and plentiful experience, as well as past committee members who are more than willing to share their expertise.

Without Andrew Peacock, Carolyn Parsons, Modeline Longjohn, Jillian Morgan, Alisha Morrissey, and of course our absolutely amazing Member Services and Communications Coordinator Wendy Rose, you wouldn't get the brilliant articles that offer different insights and points of view.

From looking at the books that have shaped us and influenced our voices to the things that inspire us, to the fact that we all have different goals with our stories and even careers.

We can never forget the importance of community, even for something that seems like such a solitary pursuit. And as things change quickly in the world around us, community and being willing to share our knowledge becomes more important than ever.

COVID lockdowns are over and we're tentatively venturing back into the open after years of being shut in, and now there's all kinds of questions about copyright, AI and what kind of future there is for authors.

The world is changing quickly after coming to a near standstill, and while WritersNL has a shiny new name and look, the strength and passion of the community remains. ❀

INKPOD PODCAST: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STORIES

By Jay McGrath, Podcast Committee Chair

As the tagline suggests, Inkpod really is all about the stories.

And this year we've heard many stories.

We heard a story from poet and playwright Agnes Walsh about how some local patrons reacted to renowned Irish poet Colm Toibin's reading at Peter Easton's pub.

We heard about how Tom Moore became a national best seller and ended up having beans with Canadian legends Margaret Atwood and Pierre Burton.

We heard how award winning writer Lisa Moore became a co-librettist with American composer Laura Kaminsky as Lisa's celebrated novel "February" goes from the page to the opera.

All these and more are available for downloading and streaming via Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Amazon Music, and Google Podcasts.

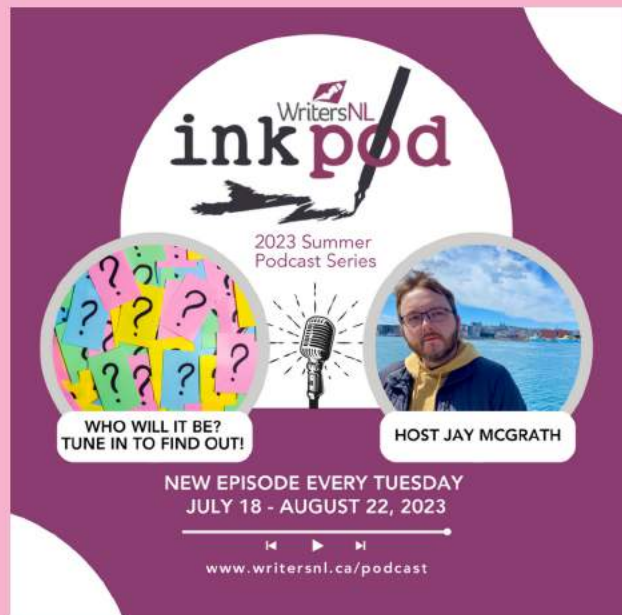
Launched in 2019, Inkpod features passionate writers, both acclaimed and aspiring, having authentic, spirited, and at times, raw conversations on their art.

With a catalogue of episodes featuring writers, publishers, professors and live WritersNL events, covering a range of topics from marketing to mentoring to the many tribulations of the writing process, there is plenty to explore at Inkpod.

Straying from its single episodic formula this year, the volunteer committee behind Inkpod shifted the focus to series format. Its first series featured guests who've had significant impact on WritersNL over the years – a retrospective look back, for sure, with an eye to what's coming next. For them and the organization.

Throughout the foggy spring, several guests ventured to the WritersNL office on Duckworth Street in downtown St. John's for the podcast recordings.

A blend of prolific writers, lifetime members, former staff, board members, and volunteers of WritersNL sat in front of the microphone (generously on loan



from media and broadcast professional Russell Bowers). Surrounded by a library of local works in the downtown office, these guests discussed their craft, their work and their impact on the literary scene. Then, the recordings were patiently edited by our talented audio editor (and composer) Elliott Butt.

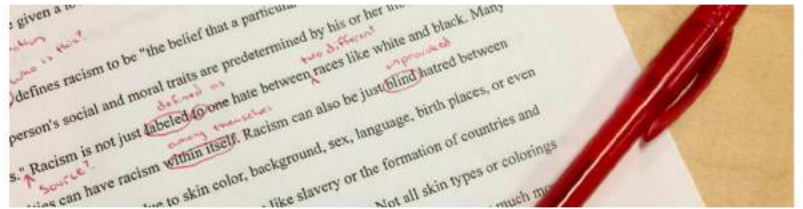
If you haven't already, please check out the 2023 Summer Series available now wherever you get your podcasts. You can also listen to all episodes by visiting the WritersNL website, and clicking on the Inkpod tab on the homepage. We hope you are inspired, empowered and completely captivated by what you hear.

Another series of recordings with an incredible lineup of guests is planned for this Fall, so be sure to click the "Follow" button on Inkpod as well as WritersNL's social media for more information as our team at Inkpod continues to explore and grow our podcast presence.

Check us out and join our growing audience as we continue to share advice, news, and inspiration to current and emerging writers from across Newfoundland and Labrador, and beyond.

Thanks for listening! ❖





WHAT MAKES A WRITER

By Olivia Bradbury

If I had to try to pinpoint the instance in which I realized I wanted to be a writer, it would probably be when I wrote a particular short story in junior high. It was about a small town where teenagers sometimes disappeared, and an old, haunted house thought to be at the centre of it all. I can't remember what led me to write it. I submitted the story to the Arts and Letters Awards that year, but I may have initially written it as a school assignment – it's been over a decade now, so I can't quite recall. I had always enjoyed doing creative writing projects in school, but this piece was, I think, critical in my realization that writing was something I wanted to do. I had to read it out to my class, and the reaction was greater than I'd expected. They seemed to really enjoy it. Seeing my classmates react so positively to something I created made me so happy. It didn't stop there, either. I ended up reading the story to other classes, too. I was a bit overwhelmed by the attention, but not in a bad way. I'd never thought I was bad at writing, but that was the day I began to realize I might be good at it.

My short story didn't place in the Arts and Letters Awards that year, but I was still happy with it. The fact that people enjoyed it made me feel proud. And so, I continued to write – for contests, for school, for my own enjoyment. I loved it. I dabbled in poetry occasionally, mostly for assignments and contests. I'm beyond grateful that a Remembrance Day poem I wrote allowed me to travel abroad and visit Beaumont-Hamel and other prominent World War I locations and memorials with the Canadian Legion. My main interest, though, has always been prose.

I was, and still am, a fan of paranormal fiction. Later in my writing career I began to branch out into mystery and thriller territory as well. Three years after I wrote my ghost story, I placed in the prose category of the Art and Letters Award with a short piece about a werewolf. I was ecstatic.

I placed in the same category the following two years, with one story centering around zombies and another around the disappearance of a young man. I was quite introverted during my childhood and adolescence, so I think my peers might have been surprised by the types of stories I wrote. I remember one occasion where a classmate, having heard I placed in a contest, congratulated me and asked what my story was about. I replied, "The zombie apocalypse." I could tell from his bemused expression that he hadn't been expecting that answer. I don't remember feeling embarrassed, though, perhaps because I'm a fan of twists in stories. I think seeing his surprise just made me feel proud.

I've continued writing into adulthood. My dream is to have my books published one day. I'm sure there are many out there who have that same dream, and maybe some haven't had the same encouragement I've had. So, if that's you, let me give you that encouragement. Maybe you haven't placed in any contests, or maybe you haven't shared your work at all yet. I understand. When I was younger, I was shy about sharing stories I'd written for myself – not for contests or school. But the number of people who've read your work and the amount of attention it's received is inconsequential when it comes to its value – if it matters to you, it matters. So, keep writing your ghosts, monsters, mysteries or whatever else you like writing about. I've worried before about my own works being too "out there." But I write them anyway. Write about what you love, the genres and topics that inspire you. We're not just creating for others – we're creating for ourselves.

And the world will be a much more colourful, inspiring, wonderful place with your passion in it. ❖

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN EDITOR

By Cassandra Filice

I've been editing for 17 years. People usually want to know about the industry (it's in absolute upheaval, if you're wondering) and will often ask about my clients. I always tell them the same thing: The best stories are the ones that go unpublished.

Roughly ten years ago, I was contacted by a woman in British Columbia. We'll name her Samantha. During our consultation, Samantha explained that she was in witness protection and needed someone to transcribe and edit her version of events from the last six years for submission to the RCMP.

I agreed. I assumed her to be a victim of domestic abuse. We set a price to be paid in advance of every (off-camera) two-hour Skype session.

By the end of our first meeting, I added another red flag to the list of clients I won't accept: Anyone who tells me they've lived in seventeen safe houses in six years because they're on a professional hitlist.

But I was hooked. If Tom Clancy and David Baldacci had a book baby, this was it. I was particularly fascinated by her midnight escape through an ancient redwood forest that culminated in her boarding a 90-horsepower boat and throttling away to Snake Island, which I'd never heard of but subsequently learned is northeast of Nanaimo, rocky, and uninhabited.

By the end of our second session, she told me that I should consider security cameras for my house and change my IP address; if "they" found her again, they could find me. The implication was clear.

Everything she said was outlandish but entirely believable. She seemed perfectly sane and rational; my husband argued that serial killers normally do. I lay awake at night considering the space between possible and plausible and couldn't make up my mind. I was getting anxious. I knew the name of the group supposedly after her. Whatever else, she hadn't made that up and I had no desire to be "disappeared" or sold into sex slavery or have my husband run over while walking the dog...

I kept our transcription appointments.

It was, actually, a dark and stormy evening when it was time for another Skype. My husband was away on a fishing trip. This all sounds outrageous, I know. But I don't write fiction, I only edit it.

In that session, she recounted the following: She came home one night and as soon as she walked through the front door she was hit by the most gut-churning, bile-raising, eye-watering stink. She followed it to the kitchen and turned to the microwave... In the microwave was her cat.

That night, I terminated our contract for my own sanity. She respected my decision, in fact, she was very gracious and understanding. I never heard from her again.

The next morning, I called the RCMP in British Columbia and gave a precis (and the microwaved cat is the sanest event she told me, so use your imagination). I heard keyboard clacking. The constable excused himself. He returned several minutes later.

"Ma'am, you're requested to cease all contact with this individual. If she attempts further communication do not respond and report to Inspector C --."

He wouldn't tell me why. He politely but firmly ended that call, but not before adding I was to contact them immediately if I felt threatened in any way, which, far from reassuring me, made me panic. I've never found out if her life was truly in danger, or if she was the danger.

Most days I sit quietly at my desk and just copyedit. But there was a Romanian whose memoir about his role in the Cold War terrified me, and a woman whose father disappeared in Gabon and was probably ritually sacrificed, and a man in Venezuela who hired me in hopes of finding an agent and then, just... disappeared. I still have his manuscript.

So, you want to be an editor? Get over the aching neck, tired eyes, caffeine addiction, and impossible deadlines (usually self-imposed), and you may read things that convince you life really is stranger than fiction. ♣



WRITING PARTNERS: A PERSPECTIVE

By Cathy Smallwood

My writing partner Susan Flanagan and I are polar opposites. Yet, she contributes more to my writing than any other person.

Not only is there a disparity in background (I'm a CFA and Susan's a townie), but our age difference means we're at different stages in our lives. Susan still has a dependent child and visits her 94-year-old mother, whereas all my children are grown, and my parents gone to the great beyond.

I'm so invested in my own precious sentences; I cannot see the flaws. Or if I can, I don't immediately know how to fix them. And even if I do, the task can seem so daunting I just want to raid the freezer and numb myself with frozen blueberries. Susan says she'd rather "crawl under a rock and make friends with a slug than face the difficult task of editing the tangly bits." My job is to drag her out from under the rock and set her back at her computer.

Every Thursday we dedicate a couple of hours to each other's writing challenges either by telephone, or in person. We've bushwhacked through the woods, explored fossils on a beach, and snowshoed to an island searching for a geocache, all the while discussing our latest writing challenges.

Susan has an amazing ability to follow my conversation as I weave three or four thoughts together in one stream of babble.

"I always feel like Cathy's getting a raw deal because after our sessions, I not only have moved forward in my project, but I feel like I've had a therapy session," she says.

Yes, I am a psychotherapist, so I enjoy working with her characters, asking difficult questions and helping her mine for answers. And we work out our own personal problems alongside them.

"You can't change anyone but yourself," I'll remind one of her characters, knowing that dictum applies to both of us in real life.

Writing is therapy and allows me to create a different version of reality.

When our lives get so hectic they threaten to overwhelm our writing projects, we help each other refocus, and make the world spin slower on its axis.

Susan's suggestions help energize my characters and infuse humour into my dense, jargon-laden dialogue of psychobabble. It's as if she's adding colour to black and white photos.

She says I inject a sense of calm in her writing. This amazes me as my mind never feels calm. But it's easier to see what needs to happen in another person's writing; we're not so invested, so we can step back and instantly see what needs to be done to improve it.

I'm precise. Some might suggest I'm compulsively obsessed with minute details. When Susan's busy barreling through the action to get to the end, I put the brakes on and badger her to sort out the fictional timeline.

We both demand each other's characters look inward long and hard until they can answer what motivates them.

In my case, I know them so well, I get caught up in arguments about how true and believable their actions are – and easily come up with excuses for their irrational behaviours.

Although our editing sessions were unaffected by COVID, we're still learning to master the challenges of using different editing software – I use Pages (Mac), she uses Microsoft Word. Recently we've switched to uploading our masterpieces in Google Docs.

Susan is the perfect life coach; she encourages me to venture beyond my safety zone, to attend WritersNL events, submit articles for publication, and join online workshops.

She's also a soul mate. No one else close to me understands the frustrations of scenes that just won't work, or the joys of finding the perfect word or phrase that captures the essence of what I'm trying to express. Or why I'd want to spend two or more hours a day writing. She says it's because we both love stories and are compelled to write our own.

The message in all of this is that two writers can have very different lives, but their shared experience of taking immense joy in successfully crafting a beautiful sentence makes for wonderful prose.

May you find your perfect writing partner. ❀

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WHAT I HAVE LEARNED WRITING CREATIVE NONFICTION

By Lindsey Harrington

I wrote my first piece of creative nonfiction (CNF) for a contest. I'd taken details, characters, or singular events from life and fictionalized them. Sure, I'd written poetry about personal experiences before, but CNF felt different. Instead of getting to decide where the narrative went, I was stuck with what actually happened and had to find how I could make those details literary. Also, the stakes seemed higher. CNF didn't provide the shield of fiction or opaqueness of poetry.

I wove a narrative from memories of fishing and family. It felt like cutting myself open and flinging my innards into the world, like fish guts extracted and tossed to gulls on those childhood trips – but in a good way. I put my soul out there and waited for the verdict on whether it was worthy.

It lost. But I wasn't ready to give up on it – or CNF – yet. After some editing, advice, time, and some more editing, I entered it elsewhere and low and behold, it won! It would be published, and I would be paid for my work. A milestone in my writing journey.

But wait. It would be published? On the internet? Anyone could read it? Family members and high school bullies would see my tender underbelly? People would see how I interpreted them? Was it worth the small cheque and minor acclaim? After some reflection, I decided I'd publish it under a pseudonym. I didn't breathe a word about it on social media.

It was a relief to avoid the familial fallout – but it also felt cowardly not to stand behind my work. It also meant I couldn't get it in the hands of as many readers or experience the full catharsis that can come with CNF.

The next CNF piece I published, I did under my own name but didn't promote it. This too, felt disingenuous. In the end, my mother found the piece buried on my website and was very hurt. We're still working our way through the fallout.

CNF is a peculiar form – full of repercussions and rewards. Here's some of what I learned:

- **Writing memoir will hurt people. People you love.**

You take your most vulnerable moments and pin them to the table for dissection – and these are not just your vulnerable moments. They also belong to your loved ones, who never asked to be analysed and splayed across the internet – no matter how small the number of readers. It will bring more struggle to already fraught dynamics.

- **Everyone's memory is vastly different.**

The most important memories of your life are unmemorable blips for others. If they do remember, they will remember entirely differently than you. You must be true to yourself and honest with your audience. There is no one truth, but you are entitled to tell yours.

- **It's incredibly personal – but you can't take it personally.**

In Grade 8 I got suspended for calling my teacher an a**hole when he gave me an 80% on my descriptive paragraph about my grandmother's garden. CNF is closer to us than fiction. It's quite literally your life. Yet you need to look at it objectively and be open to constructive feedback. You owe it to yourself – and your memories. Do them justice on the page by being open to opposing views and alternative approaches.

- **Despite all the hardships, you should do it anyway.**

Yes, there are downfalls and shortcomings, but memoir makes for compelling storytelling. It can help you understand and heal yourself. It can reconcile relationships and build new ones – helping others know they are not alone.

Now, I'm working on a full-length memoir about being childfree. I have big dreams for it. And whatever the costs, I intend to stand behind this work fully.

Writing it has helped me find my way through a difficult situation. I also believe it has the capacity to help others on similar journeys. And maybe, maybe, it can help me and my loved ones understand each other in new ways. I won't hold my breath, but I do hold out hope. ♣





LINGUISTIC CURRENTS

By Willem Peters



So, tell me, what do you love about writing?

There it is – that dreaded question. When I first set out on my quixotic journey to be a writer, I thought the worst part of choosing this intensely personal vocation would be the editing process, or the severe cases of imposter syndrome, or maybe just simply the conspicuous lack of monetary reward. But as I began to dip my toe into the murky depths of the sea of perpetual day-dreaming – I soon realized that the part of writing that I dreaded the most was the question of why exactly I was doing it.

First off, love is a strong word to describe my relationship with writing. Dysfunctional would be a better way. Sometimes, I'm convinced there is nothing to love about the writing process. Other times, I am enamoured by everything about it. It can be exhilarating one moment and tedious the next. It can go on and on with me never wanting it to stop or it can leave me wanting it to end more and more with each passing sentence. It can be kind words spoken between life-long friends and harsh words growled by irreconcilable enemies. It can be meaninglessly profound or profoundly meaningless. Sometimes, writing leaves me wondering why I even bother, and yet, what writing does most of all, and the reason I keep coming back to the incomprehensible jumble of letters on the keyboard, is that it saves me from drowning.

You see, to me, language is like a deep, fast-flowing river. The verbal side of language is mostly carried out in the shallows, close to the river's banks. Most people never venture beyond their waist in this river of language.

The shallows are where it is safe. It is where you can understand others and where others can understand you. Communication with a work colleague occurs in the shallow waters along the river of language. Ditto with acquaintances at a party.

In fact, almost all verbal interaction is carried out above the waist. It is only when the waters begin to creep up near your head that things start to become dangerous. Here, if you are not careful, you could be swept away by the complex linguistic currents.

Yet, the deeper waters are also where much of the native life resides. The eels of expression, the salmon of simile, the bass of beauty – all these elusive concepts call the darker waters home. While it is true that most people lack the skill to swim in these depths, there is another way – writing. Writing is like a boat. With it, you can ply the deeper waters of the river at your leisure. All the life of language is yours to explore. You can float dreamingly, dipping your hand in the water to watch the ensuing ripples radiate outwards. You can venture beyond the nearest bend in the river to see what is on the other side. You can even shoot the rough rapids of novel writing if you possess the courage. And maybe, if you're lucky, you'll even have a catch to bring back and show off to all those who stayed behind in the shallows.

That is what I love about writing. Sure, I get a little wet sometimes, and maybe my boat has more than a few leaks, but if the current is gentle and the water is warm, I will continue to navigate the deeper water of the linguistic river with a smile on my face and my fishing rod at the ready. ♣

A NEURODIVERGENT WRITER'S STORY

By T.C. Burse

"So, I wanted to point out that it's not just Max who displays ASD traits. I've observed many traits with you as well," she explained, her eyes telling me she was either agonizing over her words, or experiencing profound GI distress. "Enough that, at this point, a diagnosis of level one ASD is likely appropriate – what we used to refer to as Asperger's Syndrome."

At the time, I didn't know the full weight of those words. I was barely into my thirties, a struggling freelance reporter for the local news in Kingston, and a single dad of a toddler freshly diagnosed with autism. I was fortunate to see a specialist pro bono in capitalism-steeped Ontario, and even luckier to finally get that needed second opinion regarding my son's diagnosis.

My reasons? At 19 months old, Max was too young to be definitively diagnosed (or so I thought), and I was "the same way," when I was his age – going my entire adolescence in rural Newfoundland without so much as a mention of autism from my teachers.

If Max was indeed on the spectrum, it wasn't a problem – I was simply fulfilling my natural urge to be accurate in the face of uncertainty; what I now know to be a beneficial ASD trait, and not just an asset for gumshoe print media journalists.

In the days, weeks, and months to come, I'd lie awake at night replaying mental movies of my life from a remastered autistic lens, with the plot immensely clarified in hindsight – a director's cut with actor commentary:

"Terry's need for direct and specific communication, coupled with his inability to read a room, would naturally interfere with his friendships and relationships – but look at him trying his hardest all the same, with no tools to help."

The double-edged sword of ASD that I'd been armed with in secret was now being examined – hyperfixated on – and the rabbit hole of research was all-too-easy to fall into. The more I learned, the angrier I became. I found out that I was one among of the most marginalized groups of people on the entire planet.

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We (autists) were burned at the stake as witches, killed by the thousands under fascist regimes, institutionalized to spare our families their social standings – even among British royalty.

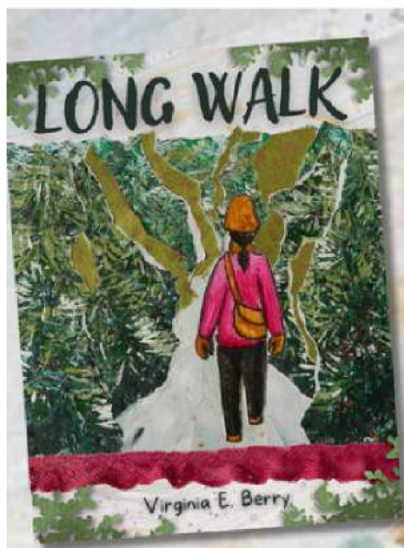
Yet, we were also brilliant physicists like Einstein and Newton, maverick paradigm shifters like Darwin and Tesla, world-movers like Jobs, Musk, and Gates... and celebrated writers such as Emily Dickinson, Hans Christian Anderson, and James Joyce. Though few, we were legion in history. Just three per cent of the population carrying the rest of humanity into the future, not with shaking steps, but in leaps and bounds – yet ironically, we were labelled as burdens by our cargo.

As with all things, I channelled these emotions – straight from the navel – into my writing. Soon, notebooks that were blank with equal parts promise and neglect were now ink-laden and spotted with bitter tears as my pen dug trenches. I expected catharsis – and got it in spades – but what I didn't expect was finding a story worth telling – coalescing from the chaos of my poems and rants like a pregnancy from a passionate tryst.

Up until then, I had given up on any serious dreams of becoming a fiction writer, though it was always my heart's desire. I loved novels, and writing fiction was even more enjoyable than reading it... but I had always gotten differing variations of the same damning criticism when it came to my manuscripts: "Verbose and overly descriptive. Characters behave oddly. Motivations unclear at times."

Sounds a lot like the "criticisms" we autists sometimes get just by being ourselves, am I right? For the first time, I considered the possibility that my being a fiction writer had promise after all. That maybe – tentatively, even – it was a measure of systemic ableism that stood in my way. I thought, perhaps I did have a perspective worth sharing in a meaningful way: through storytelling.

Would putting the reader in our shoes and asking them for a walk on the beach be such a bad idea? If all goes well, in a couple of years or less, perhaps ... we'll find out. ❖



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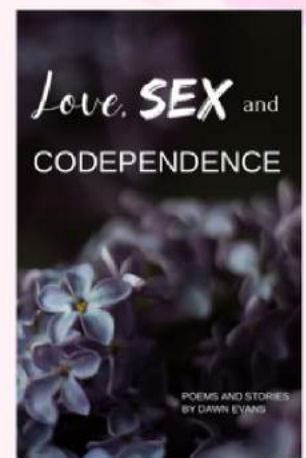
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THE PROBLEM WITH PROCESS

By Collin Glavac

Successful authors often talk about their writing process in bold and inspiring ways. Stephen King talks about a one to two-thousand-word morning routine. Danielle Steel is obsessive, working twenty-hour days. Kurt Vonnegut and Haruki Murakami incorporate vigorous physical exercise with their writing. They're all great writers, and wisdom can be taken from each of them. But they often make me feel utterly inadequate.

I'm not a process guy, I'm a product guy. Look, I know artists love process. We love to talk about it, muse about it, tinker with it; hell, it's always the first question asked on any writer's panel. And we're presumably supposed to have a better answer to why and how we write than the truth of the matter, which might just be a paycheck and a deadline.

But I have an ugly utilitarian philosophy when it comes to writing. I don't care how I get the words on the page, and I don't care how the manuscript gets finished; whatever the process, I want the end result. I had never heard of a pretty process or routine I could relate to, and I felt like I was doing something wrong – until I read a curious interview with Neil Gaiman, who spoke about Terry Pratchett's anger-fueled writing practice.

That's right. Not ideas, determination or some muse. Just pure unadulterated rage.

Finally, something relatable.

Half the time, I don't even know what I'm angry about.

Sure, there's plenty in the world to get me fired up just as much as the next person, but I don't necessarily use my frustration with socio-economic politics to put words on the page. It's more of an abstract pissy feeling.

For years I had tried to get up early and fulfill that perfect ideal of a writer: Typing away as the sunrise slowly wakes the rest of the city, enjoying a calm warm beverage and sighing at the end of a nicely written fifteen-hundred words or so, content with my productivity.

I thought that's what we had to do to be successful in our profession.

So why is it that Brandon Sanderson (one of the most prolific fantasy authors of all time) is able to roll out of bed at noon and stay up until 2 a.m. as part of his daily writing routine?

I'm not a chill guy. I'm not organized. I'm high strung. I'm a hot mess. I lie through my teeth in broad daylight every time I say the phrase "no worries."

I am much more inspired when I remember that this is a war; an epic fantastical conflict. We go to battle with our words. We don our weapons of pens and paper, computers and typewriters, and sheath ourselves in the armour of self-loathing and arguments we win days later when we're alone in the shower.

Embracing fire and brimstone has its perks. I was so pissed off at meticulously plotting out my stories that I tried "pantsing" instead (exploring a story as you go instead of planning ahead of time), which I found much more success with. Eventually I grew so angry that I had to start stories at the beginning, which I have never been particularly good at. Who says you have to start at the beginning, really? I now do something that makes most other writers cringe: I write out of order.

In one of my books, the third chapter I wrote was an action scene that ended up taking place halfway through the book. I didn't even know why these guys were fighting, but whatever, I made it make sense later. The magic of editing a first draft.

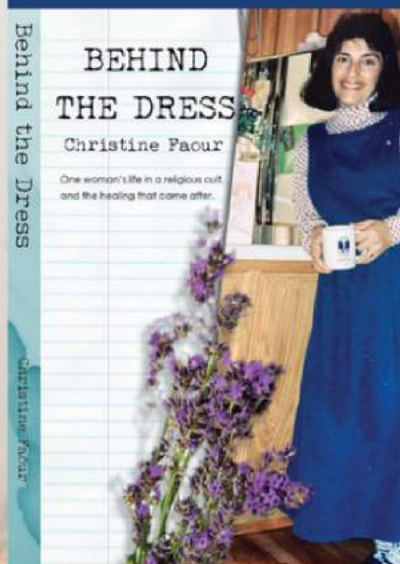
Because the thing about process? The reader never sees it. They only ever see the final, painfully edited project, without all its blemishes and half-burnt pages along the way. And as writers, I think it's the same.

We're comparing processes and trying to find the right one – the one that makes us feel like a legitimate writer. But no amount of outside validation will decide that. The words you get on the page – however they got there – will be the sole arbiter of your chosen process.

Even if it pisses you off. ❖

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COMEDY TIPS FROM A COMEDIAN

By Veronica Dymond

Veronica Dymond here, your friendly neighborhood stand-up comedian. I've written hundreds of jokes, some of which were funny, and I'm occasionally asked how to write stuff that makes people laugh. It's not easy to explain – humour is a huge topic and its nuances can't be summed up in just 600 words. Instead, here's 600 words worth of tips to jumpstart your jokes and help you hone your funny bone.

Expect the Expected

Comedy is built on the subversion of expectations – you never want your audience to guess your punchlines before you get to them. Think about what your reader thinks is going to happen. Study trends in works similar to yours – what are the clichés, the archetypes, the tropes, the motifs? Once you know what other writers are doing - don't do that!

Make the Most of Your Medium

Consider the medium you work in, down to its fundamentals. What kind of comedy works best? What's less successful? Look for opportunities to break conventions and use the unique aspects of your medium in unexpected ways.

If you work in print, you can create unlimited ridiculous scenarios and dive deep into the minds of your characters. If you work in a medium with visual elements, you can find jokes in movement, decoration, costume, anything the audience sees. Be bold!

Play with Cliché

A classic piece of writing advice is "avoid clichés," but putting a new spin on an old saying is an easy way to get a laugh. A warning: Some clichés are so cliché even jokes about them are cliché now.

Cliché: There's plenty of fish in the sea.

Joke: Sure there's plenty of fish in the sea, but there's also a lot of trash.





Rule of Three

In comedy's Rule of Three, you create a pattern, reinforce the pattern, then break the pattern.

"I like my men like I like my coffee – tall, dark, and covered in bees."

It's a simple and effective joke structure, but remember that audiences these days are savvy and might see the joke coming. Don't overuse it; keep 'em guessing; and a third thing.

Telegraph to Your Advantage

Telegraphing a joke means you unintentionally give away the punchline before you say it. Telegraphing is useful for misdirection. Make your audience think the punchline is the most obvious conclusion, then pivot at the last moment.

Plant Clues and Make Callbacks

"Planting and payoff" is a classic comedy device - you set up some element (eg. tossing away a banana peel in scene 1), then reference it later (someone slips on it in scene 2). Integrate important elements of your story early and subtly, so no one sees it coming when you use them. Callbacks are similar, except instead of deliberately adding in an element, you look at material you already have and find a way to tie it into a later moment.

If you look for places to make connections within material already there, your story will be both more cohesive and funnier.

Consider the Obvious, the Opposite, and the Original

When you come up with an idea, you tend to go for the Obvious, then the Opposite, then the Original. Imagine you have a villain - what colour should they be associated with?

Black is the Obvious answer; it's easy to understand, but it's not very unique. White is the Opposite answer; it's a bit more of a surprise for a villain, but it's also still a reaction to your first thought.

The Original is anything not the first two - say, polka dots. None of these answers is "right" or "correct" for comedy, but if you are trying to surprise your audience and push your creativity, your first or even second thought might not quite get you there.

Try coming up with 3 punchlines, and see which you like best.

Make Yourself Laugh

Some people think it's bad to laugh at your own jokes, but if you're laughing, someone else will probably laugh, too.

**Be your own first audience and make jokes that you think are funny –
if you're having fun, other people will too. ♣**

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?

By Tracy Kreuzburg

This is a question I've not been asked often enough, because it happens to be an important one. I think this is especially the case for writers. I know when I think of my favourite book, it takes me back to the beginning.

Like many of us, I first learned to love fairy-tale stories as a young child, and being a brand-new little person, I loved being read to while looking at colourful pictures. Soon after, I was reading every fairy-tale children's book I could get my hands on. I moved on to reading novels by the time I was eight, and started writing my own magical stories when I was ten. When asked to write creatively for English class in elementary and junior high school, I usually chose to create a whimsical or fabled narrative.

But even when I branched out from these tales, I was always drawn to things that had an air of mystique, like dolls and marionettes. I often drew pictures of princesses and castles. As a teenager, I sometimes imagined I slept in a treehouse when I climbed the wooden ladder to the top bunkbed in my room, which I begrudgingly shared with my sister. A return to my fairy-tale and storytelling days was meant to be.

I was in my early 20s perusing the local bookstore (still a regularly relished pastime of mine) when I found it. The Jungian psychoanalyst's book was shelved on a book display, presented as a 'best seller.' But I was immediately drawn to it because of the title, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. I had loved wolves for as long as I could remember, and well, I was also a knowledge-thirsty young woman. The idea that a woman could be naturally paired with a wolf was new and strange, but it sat right with me in that moment and so I bought the book.





I didn't know then that it was the start of a decades-long journey for me, and was a text that I would bury myself in many times over. With one glance, you would immediately recognize that the black paperback with gold print letters is very well loved.

Through the ups and downs of my life, discerning and expressing life's truths through storytelling, including fairy tales, has always been a fulfilling experience. Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes Reyes' book is chock full of these and is fittingly subtitled 'Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype.'

Each section of the book is like each leg of a journey, and I think that is how it is for everyone's favourite book. Sometimes you have a need to revisit a particular chapter, while another time, you may pick it up and must start right from the beginning. And chances are, you learn something new about yourself or the world every single time you turn the page.

Each time you discover something, or learn it differently, the more fodder you have for writing, whether it's for books, poetry, articles, or creative short stories.

I sometimes call my imaginative writings 'truth tales.' Whether fiction or nonfiction, each thread of the 'yarn' can be spun into a beautiful web like no other.

Think of Charlotte, the famous spider character we were introduced to as children. We loved her for her acuity and wisdom, her 'terrific' web-spinning, while in the prime of our tenderfoot young lives. Of course, we can never be this young again, but we are not getting old. We are growing older. Like Charlotte.

Our minds and our souls never ever stop expanding. Just a few years ago, the thought of this might have overwhelmed or exhausted me, but now it leaves me with a sense of wonderment, and even an itch for adventure from time to time.

If you have a book you return to that brings you joy and learning every time you lift the cover (which you may love almost as much as the words waiting behind it) you already know what I am talking about. If you don't have this 'favourite' book yet I hope with all of my heart that you soon will. ❖



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HOW I BATTLED A BUMBLEBEE AND WRITER'S BLOCK LAST SUMMER

By Melissa Wong

For days, I struggled to write, to put pen to paper, to put my fingers to computer keys. I confess that I pressured myself to write a comedic masterpiece because I wanted it to be funny, but that expectation froze me. The fear would not let me write anything. I could not express my joy through the symbols on the page. When I forced myself to write - everything I created was a clichéd tragedy filled with fear.

Looking for more upbeat creative inspiration, I messaged one of my oldest friends seeking words of wisdom. After requesting some much-needed advice, I watched the screen stare blankly back at me before the long-awaited text appeared.

The sage's advice was, "How should I know? Touch grass."

Oh, how I longed to touch the grass. How I wished nature was this mysterious force that could magically give me the ideas that I needed to write a funny story. That was not always the case, nature did not exist to inspire artists, but I decided to go outside and see if braving the elements would help.

After coating my skin with sunscreen I found in the bathroom, I went outside to see my Tina tomato plants. All my tomatoes are named Tina. I have Tina tomato plants indoors and outdoors, but I could only touch grass outside so, I went to my backyard.

While watering the Tina tomato growing in our raised bed, I asked the plant how my friend's words of wisdom could help me write something funny. Tina did not have anything to say. She usually did not talk, but she was a great listener.

That was why I was shocked to hear a small sound.

Looking around, I saw my deadly enemy. A ninja wasp crept up on me like a shadow before zooming around my head like a warplane.

Deciding to retreat inside the house, I grabbed the small green spray bottle I used to water the Tina tomato plants inside the house. For armour, I chose my winter coat.

Brandishing the spray bottle like a sword, I returned to the backyard and engaged in combat with the angry wasp that buzzed around my head. My water droplet attack was too much. The droplets landed on the wasp's delicate wings. The weight of the water forced the tiny creature to land on a tree leaf nearby.

At that point, my mother stuck her head out the door to see what I was doing. I told Mamma the gripping tale as she examined the wasp trying to dry its wings in the sunlight.

"That is no wasp," Momma said. "That is a bee trying to pollinate the tomato plants."

"Look, she had fur. Wasps do not have fur."

I looked closely and realized the soaked creature did indeed have a fur coat.

Later, I remember watching from the deck as the little bumblebee dried off in the sunlight. If not for Momma, I could have traumatized the bee, and this little adventure could have had a tragic ending. Then, I realized something... Why did I care if the stories I wrote were dark?

Trying to feel happy all the time only led to guilt and shame when I was not happy. Was having different emotions not part of life?

I decided I was not going to try to write a happy story just to write a happy story. Empty happiness would only create an empty story. I just had to write a story that felt right for me.

All that mattered was that it had to mean something to me. I had to allow myself some sincerity – even in the most outlandish plot. It had to feel right for me.

As I came to this realization, the tiny bumblebee flew into the air. I watched with a smile as it fly away into the bright blue sky .

Then, I realized that the bumblebee never bothered to pollinate my tomatoes. ❖



NEWFOUNDLAND'S CREATIVE HAVEN: A WRITER'S JOURNEY OF SOULFUL CONNECTION

By Sheldon Crocker

In the captivating realm of Newfoundland, where my heart was nurtured and my spirit awakened, the profound influence of this land on my creative journey cannot be understated. It is a place where the raw beauty of nature intertwines with the vibrancy of culture, weaving a tapestry of emotions that fuels my writing with an indescribable warmth and passion. Today, I invite you to embark on an intimate exploration of my personal odyssey as a writer in Newfoundland, as we delve into the depths of heartfelt connection and evoke the tenderest of emotions. Together, we will uncover the power of vulnerability, the magic of human connection, and the transformative nature of storytelling.

Close your eyes for a moment and let the gentle whispers of Newfoundland's breathtaking scenery embrace your soul. Feel the cool mist of the ocean spray on your skin, hear the rhythmic lullaby of crashing waves against rocky shores, and breathe in the earthy scent of lush forests that dance in the wind. These natural wonders are not mere sights to behold;

they are living, breathing entities that hold the power to awaken the deepest corners of our being. As a writer, I have learned that it is in surrendering to the embrace of this enchanting landscape that my words find their truest form, carrying within them the echoes of love, longing, and profound connection.

Allow me to share a tender moment that unfolded during one of my solitary walks along Newfoundland's rugged coast. As I sat on a weathered rock, pen in hand, a gentle puff of wind rustled the pages of my notebook. In that sacred instant, a seagull soared overhead, its wings outstretched as if reaching for the heavens.

I couldn't help but be overwhelmed by the interconnectedness of all things – the harmony of nature and the intricate threads that bind us together. It is within these precious moments that vulnerability becomes a source of strength, and our words become a conduit for shared experiences and the tenderest of emotions.



Newfoundland's rich history and cultural heritage serve as a wellspring of inspiration, providing a powerful means to delve into the depths of the human experience. The stories of our ancestors passed down through generations, are the threads that bind us to our roots and shape our collective identity.

As writers, we have the privilege and responsibility to breathe life into these tales, and to honor the struggles and triumphs of those who came before us. Through the art of storytelling, we touch the hearts of readers, invoking a sense of belonging, stirring memories, and illuminating the universal truths that unite us all.

In this journey of soulful connection, I offer you a guiding light to kindle the flames of your creative spirit:

Embrace vulnerability:

Allow yourself to be raw and authentic, for it is within vulnerability that the truest connections are forged. Share your fears, your joys, and your deepest desires through your words, and watch as readers respond with an outpouring of empathy and understanding.

Cultivate human connection:

Seek out the shared experiences that unite us all. Engage in conversations, listen to the stories of others, and find solace in the knowledge that we are never alone in our journey. Through connection, we find inspiration, support, and the courage to continue writing with an open heart.

Create with intention:

Let your words be a beacon of light in the darkness, offering hope, comfort, and understanding to those who read them. Write with the purpose of touching lives, igniting passions, and evoking the full spectrum of human emotions.

Honour the power of storytelling:

Recognize the transformative nature of stories. They have the ability to heal wounds, close divides, and build bridges of empathy. Embrace your role as a storyteller and wield your words with intention, knowing that you have the power to change lives, one story at a time.

In conclusion, my fellow seekers of emotional truth, being a writer in Newfoundland is a journey of the heart. It is a testament to the power of vulnerability, the magic of human connection, and the transformative nature of storytelling. Let the essence of this land infuse your words with warmth, tenderness, and a profound sense of purpose. Together, let us embark on a journey of soulful connection, where our stories intertwine, and our hearts find solace in the beauty of the written word.

With a heart overflowing with passion and gratitude, I submit this humble offering. May it touch the hearts of readers, inspire fellow wordsmiths, and remind us all of the extraordinary power of storytelling. ❖

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

By Nancy Gear

I am willing to bet whatever money I have to spare, that the majority of people have a different definition of what success means to them. I've decided to be blatantly derivative in my approach to introduce this topic (Then again, isn't everything at least a little derivative of something else?).

According to the Oxford Dictionary, success is defined as, "the accomplishment of an aim or purpose," which made me think a little more clearly about something that has perplexed me for over a decade.

What do I want to accomplish?
What is my aim?
What is my purpose?

After chatting with a few people I know (who by the way, were not phased by me questioning their own definitions of success, as random questions are sort of my thing), I received a variety of answers, mainly quite wholesome, which interested me.

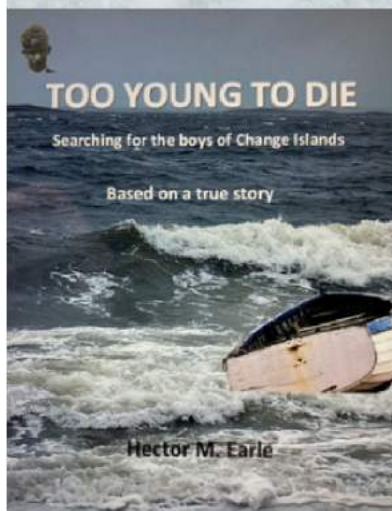
I've heard many definitions throughout my life, like: "Success is my health and happiness," "Success is getting married and creating a family," "Success is getting my PhD," "Success is living comfortably with enough finances," "Success is being known and loved." Is 'success' starting to sound quite odd now?

Well, buckle up because you'll likely hear it another 20 times...

In my experience, I feel that I've been fighting society's, sometimes very shallow, definitions of success for a long time (making six figures or being the poster person for health and secondary education, for a quick example). It hasn't been easy where I could just say, "Hey Nancy, your idea of success is your own, and doesn't have to carry the torch of pressure from surrounding people from the fear of being judged or perceived in a certain way!" and feel all better. I am aware that everyone has their own subconscious biases, whether they want to or not, and I've spent a lot of my adulthood challenging my own.

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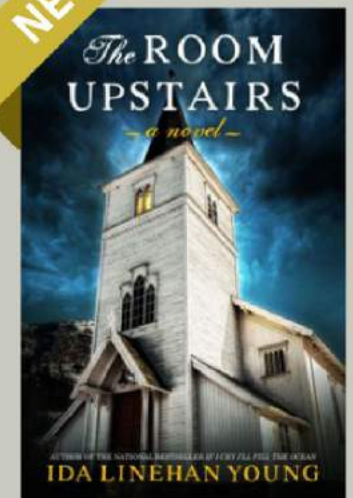
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So, what is my definition of success, you might ask? What a wonderful and unexpected question! Now, what I am about to say might change in a year, or even tomorrow, but in my decade of adulthood I've learned that life is nothing but an experience that has been made complicated by all of the hens (people) in this henhouse (the world). My idea of success revolves around not taking myself or my experience all too seriously.

Of course, fighting for other beings who need help that I can give, and using my power for good and not evil is to be taken seriously. Other than that, I'm just a person on Earth living a silly little life.

I feel so fortunate to be a relatively healthy and happy person that exists and gets to give the human experience a good ole college try.

My definition, perhaps, would be to make the best out of my gift that is life, be a 'good' person, do what I can with what I have, work with the cards I'm dealt and see where the wind blows me, give myself the opportunities to experience the many emotions that humans are capable of, and make connections with a variety of other beings that are living lives at the same time as me.

We all have our own outlooks on life, shaped by our surroundings. Argue with me if you'd like, but no life experience is identical, therefore, the diverse ideals of life itself are natural. Who am I to say that your dreams and goals are wrong? I may have my silly little opinion on some of them but what do I know, I'm just working with the cards I've been dealt and seeing where the wind blows me.

I will say that I don't believe success is a destination, it feels sort of never-ending to me, and subject to change. The learning and taking ideas from society isn't a fixed phenomenon. Our surroundings and circumstances change, therefore so do we. To be open to that change, open to learning and new ideas, I think that is successful. ❀





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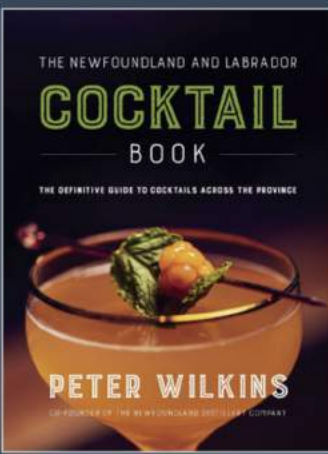
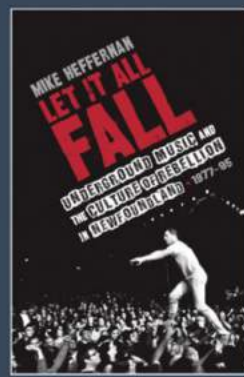
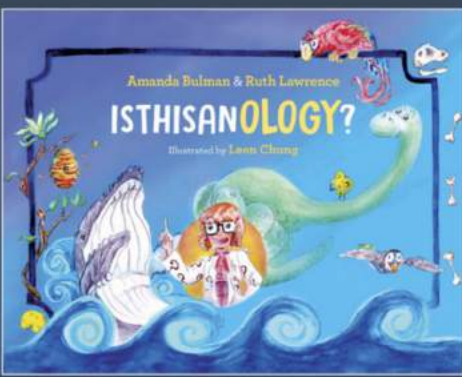
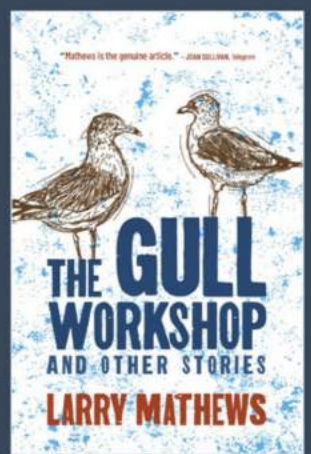
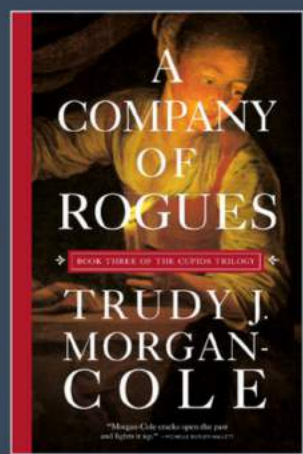
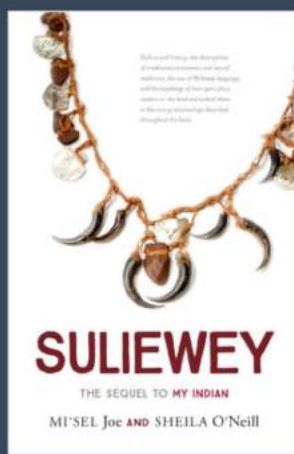
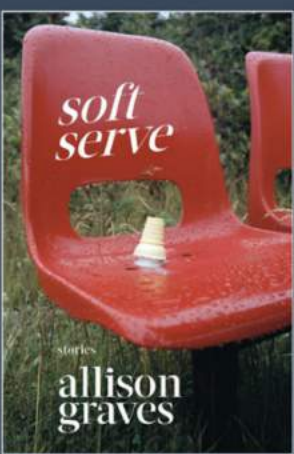
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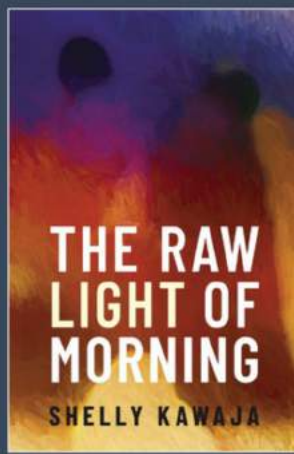
50
YEARS

LIFE BEGINS AT 50

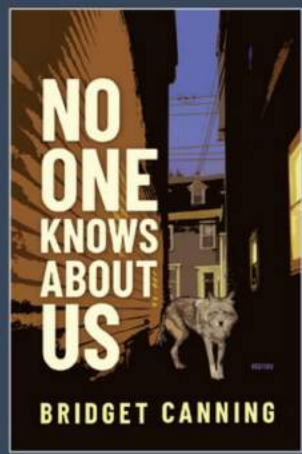
& we're just getting going!



Shortlisted for the 2023 Taste Canada Awards: Regional/Cultural Cookbooks



Winner of the 2022 BMO Winterset Award



Shortlisted for the Alistair McLeod Short Story Prize

