

LENNY YES, JONI NO

That was a well-researched feature on literary visitors, but how disappointing that the writer did not dig deeper beyond male chauvinism to add a few more female writers! If you are going to highlight Leonard Cohen, then why not Joni Mitchell? If you included Pope John Paul, then why not Gloria Steinem? Maybe the writer of the article lost his government research grant and ran out of money. Really now! I thought we women did not have to keep raising these equality & liberation issues!

B. Yaworski
Delta

[Leonard Cohen writes books; Joni Mitchell does not. And she lived on the Sunshine Coast. Yes, the paucity of famous female authors—not on book tours—was problematic. More suggestions from readers are welcome.—Ed.]

SEAMUS WAS HERE

While guest lecturer at Berkeley, Seamus Heaney made a brief visit to Vancouver in 1971 to give a reading sponsored by UBC. He was second on the bill to Rainer Schulte. As Seamus and my husband George McWhirter had been at university in Belfast together, he stayed with us in a rental house at 4659 West 8th Avenue in Vancouver. A father of two wee boys, Seamus was a wonderful houseguest and not perturbed when our youngest leaned out of his high chair and chucked up by Seamus's dinner plate. Earlier that year, Marie, his wife had been mugged in Berkeley, and I remember him being anxious about his family in California and getting back home to Ireland.

Angela McWhirter
Vancouver



Cohen meets Mitchell, Newport Folk Festival, 1967, prior to their fling

THOR HEYERDAHL

Two addendums to your fascinating round-up of literary visitors:

In addition to spending time at Bella Coola, Thor Heyerdahl worked at the Trail smelter for about a year, starting in 1940. One of Heyerdahl's children appears in a Sunday school registry held by the local archives.

Theodore Roosevelt first saw B.C. in 1888, during a month-long hunting trip on Kootenay Lake. He devoted a chapter to it in *The Wilderness Hunter* (1893), and mentioned it in subsequent works. Roosevelt biographers, if they remark on this trip at all, usually overlook the fact it was predominantly in B.C., and instead say he went hunting "in northern Idaho" or in "Idaho's Kootenai country."

Greg Nesteroff
Castlegar

HI, SOCIETY

Your recent article about Richard Olafson, "Final Chapter," is a wake up call to all of us interested in BC books. The loss of Ekstasis Editions would be a huge loss. However, there was a possible implication in the article that all of Richard's offshoots, the Pacific Festival of the Book, the City of Victoria Book Prize and the *Pacific Rim Review of Books*, could also be in jeopardy. I am very happy to tell you that the Victoria Book Prize Society is alive and very well.



Arleen Paré, winner, 2008 Butler Prize

The Capital Region is home to many great writers and this year there were 48 entries for the City of Victoria Butler Book Prize and 21 for the Bolen Books Children's Book Prize. Each prize is \$5000 and were awarded at the Union Club of BC on October 14, 2009. Outside of Ottawa and Toronto, these are the largest book prizes at the city level, in Canada.

Richard Olafson was one of the founding members of the Society which worked so hard to establish a book prize for Victoria authors.

Mary Virtue, President
Victoria

Letters or emails contact:

BC BookWorld, 3516 W. 13th Ave.,
Vancouver, BC V6R 2S3
email: bookworld@telus.net

Letters may be edited for clarity & length.



Charles Bukowski

GENTLE BUK

Thank you for your "25 Famous Literary Visitors" issue, including a picture of Charles Bukowski's 1979 reading at The Viking Inn in Vancouver. Bukowski actually fell against a radiator in The Sylvia Hotel, when he was smashed, *after* the reading. For years I thought that was last reading he ever gave that was captured on film, but, in fact, the reading he gave six months later in Redondo Beach (which I attended, as well) was also recorded. The DVDs are available at BukowskiLive.com. Most of what Hank did on stage was an act. In person he was kind, gentle and very wise.

D.B. Del Torre
Vancouver

ALEISTER CROWLEY

Thanks for the great issue about international literary visitors to British Columbia. It should be noted that Rupert Brooke, Hart Crane, Blaise Cendrars and Aleister Crowley all visited Vancouver at one time. Rupert Brooke traveled to Vancouver with the Hon. Robert Rogers, minister of public works, and wrote about his visit in *Letters from America*. Hart Crane visited Vancouver (when he was 17) with his mother, Grace, and Blaise Cendrars wrote a great poem about his visit called *Vancouver: a Docupoem*.



Aleister Crowley

Aleister Crowley wrote in *Confessions*: "Vancouver presents no interest to the casual visitor. It is severely Scotch. Its beauties lie in its surroundings." He continued: "I was very disappointed with the Rockies, of which I had heard such eloquent encomiums. They are singularly shapeless; and their proportions are unpleasing. There is too much colourless and brutal base; too little snowy shapely summit. As for the ghastly monotony of the wilderness beyond them, through Calgary and Winnipeg right on to Toronto—words fortunately fail. ... Toronto as a city carries out the idea of Canada as a country. It is a calculated crime both against the aspirations of the soul and the affections of the heart."

Richard Olafson

Victoria



JOSEPH FARRIS ILLUSTRATION

BC
BOOKWORLD

AUTUMN
2009

Issue,
Vol. 23, No. 3

Publisher/ Writer: **Alan Twigg**
Editor/Production: **David Lester**

Publication Mail Agreement #40010086
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: BC BookWorld,
3516 W. 13th Ave., Vancouver, BC V6R 2S3

Produced with the sponsorship of **Pacific BookWorld News Society**. Publications Mail Registration No. 7800.
BC BookWorld ISSN: 1701-5405

Advertising & editorial: **BC BookWorld**, 3516 W. 13th Ave.,
Vancouver, B.C., V6R 2S3. Tel/Fax: 604-736-4011 • Email:
available on request. Annual subscription: **\$19.08**

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Photographers: Barry Peterson, Laura Sawchuk.
Proofreaders: Wendy Atkinson, Betty Twigg.
Design: Get-to-the-Point Graphics. **Deliveries:** Ken Reid

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DU CANADA
DEPUIS 1957

WHO'S WHO

B R I T I S H C O L U M B I A



Maggi Feehan



Shelley Adams

E is for Evanoff

A pioneer of eco-tourism in the northern Rocky Mountains, **George Evanoff**, son of Macedonian immigrants, became legendary as a mountaineer and conservationist before he lost his life in an encounter with a grizzly bear in 1988. Based on a 20-year friendship with Evanoff, **Mick Nash** of Prince George has produced **The Mountain Knows No Expert** (Dundurn \$28.99), a biography that traces Evanoff's life from Depression-era Alberta to the tops of the Rockies.

978-1-55002-868-3

H is for Harvey

With a gargantuan photo archive consisting of almost half a million images, veteran photographer and avid outdoorsman **Al Harvey**, born in Vancouver in 1944, has easily provided the stunning photos for the souvenir album **Portrait of British Columbia** (Heritage \$16.95).

978-1-894974-45-5

I is for Isumataq

Born in England, raised in Portugal, **Ken Kirkby** was transformed as an artist when he lived off the land with the Inuit for four years. **Goody Niosi's** **Ken Kirkby: A Painter's Quest for Canada** (Libros



Ken Kirkby and Isumataq

Libertad \$27.95) traces Kirkby's evolution and his successful, ten-year-long completion of his masterwork *Isumataq*, unveiled as a 25-foot model in Parliament in 1992.

The original is 152' long and 12' high.

Isumataq is an Inuit word meaning, "An object in the presence of which wisdom might show itself," and refers to the man-like monuments of stone called *Inuksuit* that Inuit have erected as guides and markers of good hunting and fishing.

978-0-9810735-7-6

continued on page 6

A is for Adams

Having worked as a chef at Whistler and in the film industry, **Shelley Adams** also ran the Fresh Tracks Café when she was a co-owner of the Whitewater ski hill near Nelson. Adams' widely-reviewed first book, *Whitewater Cooks: Pure, Simple and Real Creations from the Fresh Tracks Café* was self-published and reputedly sold 5,000 copies before Whitecap Books took it under their imprint. She has opted to self-publish her follow-up, **Whitewater Cooks at Home** (Sandhill \$34.95), which zoomed to the top of the BC Bestsellers List.

978-0-9811424-0-1

B is for Belshaw

North Island College professor **John Douglas Belshaw** has revised the theory that population growth necessarily equates with progress for **Cradle to Grave: A Population History of British Columbia** (UBC Press \$85), with an emphasis on aboriginal depopulation, settler-era sex ratios, fertility patterns and immigration.

978-0-7748-1545-1

C is for Carolan

Having just co-edited **Against the Shore: The Best of the Pacific Rim Review of Books** (Ekstasis \$22.95), a review publication he has produced with **Richard Olafson** since 2005, **Trevor Carolan** of University College of the Fraser Valley has gathered twenty-one contemporary short stories in English from East and Southeast Asia for **Another Kind of Paradise** (Cheng & Tsui \$19.95 us). It includes writers from Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Bangladesh and elsewhere, with brief introductions to each author's works and life. Shore 978-1-897430-34-7; Paradise 978-0-887276-84-2

D is for Dauncey

As president of the B.C. Sustainable Energy Association, **Guy Dauncey** describes steps being taken around the world to address climate change, showing how it is possible to reduce our carbon footprint to almost zero by 2040, in **The Climate Challenge: 101 Solutions to Global Warming** (New Society \$24.95), due in November.

9-780-865715899

F is for Feehan

Maggi Feehan travelled to India, England and Ireland to research her debut novel **The Serpent's Veil** (ThistleDown \$18.95) about two independent-minded women who meet in a London hospital near the end of the 19th century. With flashbacks and dreams we learn the adventures of Constance Stubbington and Ank Maguire over three continents—from the bogs of Ireland, to the streets of Victoria, B.C., through the Raj lands of India, and to the scary grimy world of east London's Southwark district.

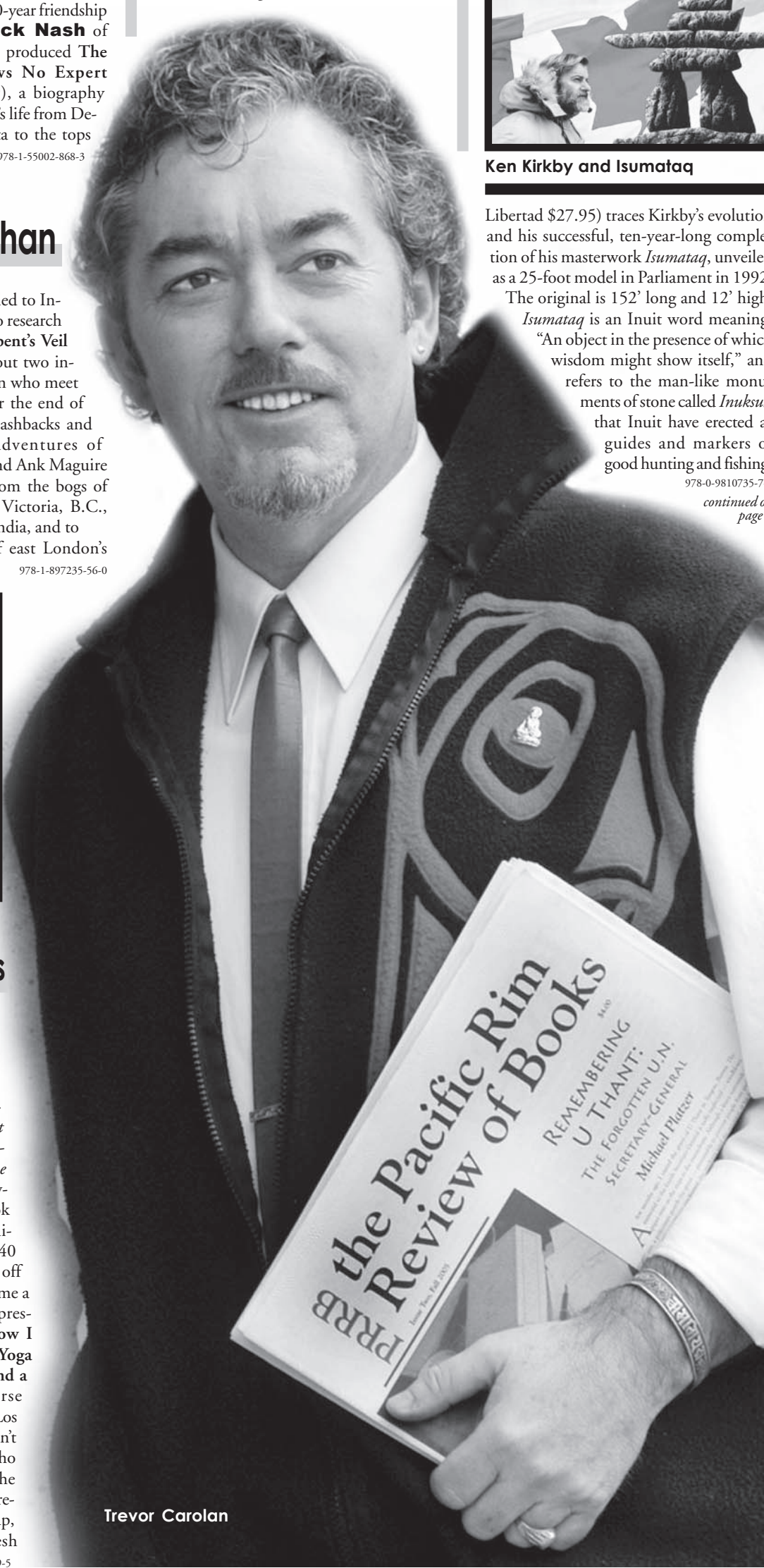
978-1-897235-56-0



Jessica Berger Gross

G is for Gross

Ex-New Yorker **Jessica Berger Gross** of the UBC Creative Writing program received a National Parenting Publication Award for *About What Was Lost: 20 Writers on Misadventure, Healing, and Hope* (Plume 2007). Her follow-up is a memoir/handbook chronicling how yoga philosophy helped her lose 40 pounds, keep the weight off for seven years and overcome a lifelong struggle with depression, **enLIGHTened: How I Lost 40 Pounds with a Yoga Mat, Fresh Pineapples, and a Beagle Pointer** (Skyhorse \$24.95). "Having lived in Los Angeles," she says, "I couldn't help but run into yogis who have done, and loved, The Master Cleanse—a fasting regime involving maple syrup, cayenne pepper, and fresh lemon juice..." 978-1-60239-639-5



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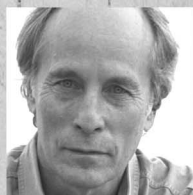
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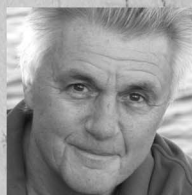
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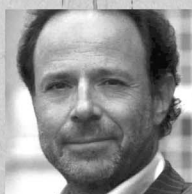
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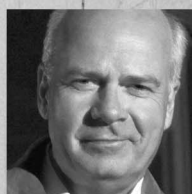
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WHO'S WHO BRITISH COLUMBIA

J is for Juby

Humourist **Susan Juby** has a serious book about teenage addictions, due in the spring. "My family seems to specialize in people who enjoy drinking," she says. "And taking drugs. In such families, there is usually one person who stands out as particularly gifted in the field. When I was a teenager, that person was me. It was the star, the **Alec Baldwin**, if you will. I started drinking seriously when I was thirteen, smoking pot with a vengeance at fourteen and getting into cocaine at sixteen. By the time I was twenty I was done. **Nice Recovery** (Viking \$20) is the story of how I slipped so far off course, how I got back on track and, most importantly, what it's like to come of age as a sober young person."

978-0-670-06917-0



Susan Juby

N is for Norton

Wayne Norton's interest in women's ice hockey was sparked by childhood visits to his grandparents in Fernie. The Kootenays were the geographic heart of women's hockey in B.C. prior to World War I, as Norton has documented in **Women on Ice: The Early Years of Women's Hockey in Western Canada** (Ronsdale \$21.95). The most famous women's hockey team was the Vancouver Amazons. Top female teams from Alberta are also profiled. 978-1-55380-073-6

O is for Olympics

He's baaaack. To coincide with the Winter Games, **Michael Slade** (aka lawyer **Jay Clarke**) has fashioned a five-ring circus of 2010 mayhem and murder for everyone stuck on the Sea to Sky Highway. In his latest corpse-filled thriller, **Red Snow** (Penguin \$24), mercenaries isolate Whistler Mountain, putting the Olympics in jeopardy, as Slade pits his psycho-villain Mephisto against the RCMP's Special X squad, enabling publicists to gleefully declare, Let The Games Begin. 978-0-14-316779-2

P is for Parsons

Half-Italian and originally named Parsonage, soon-to-retire BCTV anchorman **Tony Parsons**, age 70, grew up in small-town Ontario where his alcoholic father left his mother to raise her six children. Married three times with no children, Parsons is an obsessive golfer who has himself battled the bottle. He is devoted to his canine pal, Jack, a Maltese cross who sleeps at his feet during newscasts. His memoir is **A Life in the News** (Harbour \$32.95).

978-1-55017-461-8

continued on page 9



Tony Parsons

L is for Lutz

The Canadian Historical Association's 2009 Clio Prize for British Columbia was granted to **Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations** (UBC Press) by **John Sutton Lutz**.

9780774811408

M is for McCracken

Former Banyen Books employee **Kay McCracken** has lived on a commune in the Kootenays and has been in love more times than she cares to remember. In 1993, she moved to Salmon Arm from Vancouver and decided to open a bookstore called Reflections, choosing the name from the title of a book on her father's shelf by **Carl Jung**. Her memoir **A Raven in My Heart: Reflections of a Bookseller** (Gracesprings Collective \$27.95) was launched in Salmon Arm at the SAGA Public Art Gallery in June. 978-0-9809608-2-2



Kay McCracken

Q is for Queers

Based on documents released through the Access to Information Act, as well as interviews with gays, lesbians and civil servants, **Gary Kinsman** and **Patrizia Gentile's** *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation* (UBC Press \$85) is a 560-page investigation of a national security campaign that was undertaken by the state to harass and restrict the freedom of homosexuals in Canada from the 1950s to the late 1990s. 978-0-7748-1627-4

R is for Ruggier

Joe M. Ruggier of Richmond (formerly of Malta) has self-published his *Collected Poems and Prose 1972-2009* (\$50 jrmbooks@hotmail.com), an eclectic, 550-page mix of religious poetry, criticism and prose poems heavily influenced by Mediterranean Catholic devotion. 978-1-897303-07-8

S is for Sondhi

Co-founder of the Lululemon clothing company, **Amrita Sondhi**, author of *The Modern Ayurvedic Cookbook* (Arsenal \$26.95), is hosting a new television program on The Body Mind and Spirit network in Canada that debuted in July. *The Ayurvedic Way* is a thirteen-episode series that introduces viewers to Ayurveda's holistic approach to health and wellness, demonstrating an array of recipes and exercises that can help to promote weight loss, combat stress and anxiety, and foster a great sense of well-being. 9781551522043



Amrita Sondhi

T is for Tovell

Freeman Tovell, now 91 years old and living in Victoria, spent the last 30 years researching and writing about the life of Peruvian-born **Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra**. The resultant biography, *At the Far Reaches of Empire: The Life of Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra* (UBC Press \$85), has received the Keith Matthews Award from the Canadian Nautical Research Society for best book on a Canadian nautical subject in 2009. It's the first in-depth career profile, in English, of the pre-eminent Spanish sea captain in the Pacific Northwest prior to 1800. 9780774813662

U is for Usukawa

Saeko Usukawa, editorial director at Douglas & McIntyre for almost 30 years, died on July 5, 2009 at age 63, having edited dozens of important Canadian books with the likes of **Wayson Choy**, **Sky LEE**, **Douglas Coupland** and **Hilary Stewart**. In 2007, Saeko received the Tom Fairley Award for Editorial Excellence for her work on *Abstract Painting in Canada* by **Roald Nasgaard**. She also edited *Sound Heritage: Voices from British Columbia* (1984) and she co-authored *Tales in the Saddle: Great Lines from Classic Westerns* (1997) with her partner, filmmaker **Peggy Thompson**, along with *Hard-Boiled: Great Lines from Classic Noir Films* (1995). Usukawa compiled *The Little Lavender Book of the Love that Once Dared Not Speak Its Name* for Arsenal Pulp Press.



Onjana Yawngwhwe

V is for Violini

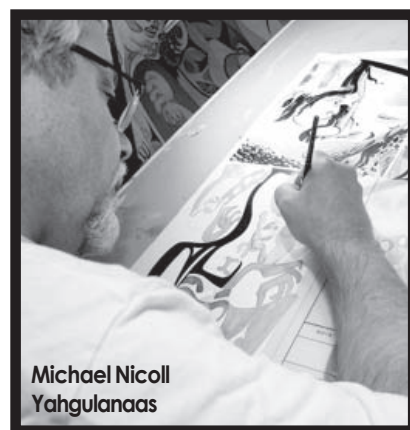
Juanita Rose Violini ran murder mystery events in Vancouver for eighteen years, leading her to produce a potpourri of history's mysteries and unexplained events, *Almanac of the Infamous*, *The Incredible* and *The Ignored* (Red Wheel \$19.95). This self-illustrated trivia and reference work covers the gamut from Peking Man to UFOs. 978-1-57863-447-7

W is for Wynand

As an editor of *The Malahat Review*, **Derk Wynand** has translated contemporary German poetry for decades. *Glass Voices Lasinaanet* (Buschek \$17.50) is his second translation of **Dorothea Grunzweig**, a German poet now living in Finland. We encounter snowsage, mercyfield, praisesobbing and summersated. According to our reviewer **Hannah Main-van der Kamp**, "Wynand's nervy compound words open up new possibilities of meaning." 1894543491

X is for Xerography

Xerography is a literary journal co-founded by **Onjana Yawngwhwe** who also operates a 'micro press' for hand-made publications called Fish Magic Press. Born in Chiang Mai, Thailand, she grew up in Vancouver and now lives in Burnaby. Featuring work by Yawngwhwe, **Daniela Elza**, **Peter Morin** and **Al Rempel**, 4 poets (Mother Tongue \$18.95) is the first volume in a proposed series to highlight emerging poets. It includes poetry drafts, interviews, author photographs, poetics and short biographies as well as translations of select poems into French, Thai, Bulgarian and Tahlтан. 978-1-896949-03-1



Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas

Y is for Yahgulanaas

Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas has won a gold medal in the Storyteller of the Year Award category of the US-based Independent Publisher Awards for *Flight of the Hummingbird: A Parable for the Environment* (D&M). His forthcoming *Red: A Haida Manga* (D&M \$28.95) is a full-colour graphic novel about Red, a leader so blinded by revenge that he leads his community to the brink of war and destruction. 978-1-55365-353-0

Z is for Zapata

Dedicated to children around the world who don't have enough to eat, **Emilie Smith's** *Viva Zapata* (Tradewind \$16.95) is a fanciful tale about how Mexican revolutionary leader **Emiliano Zapata** vowed to address poverty as a boy after meeting bandits who had stolen his black horse named Sombra. Smith befriended her co-writer **Margarita Kenefic Tejada** in a Mexican village one day's horseback ride from Emiliano Zapata's home. Art by **Stefan Czernecki**. 978-1-896580-55-5

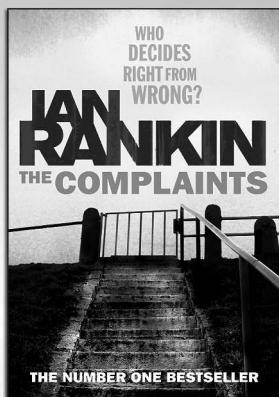


Emilie Smith

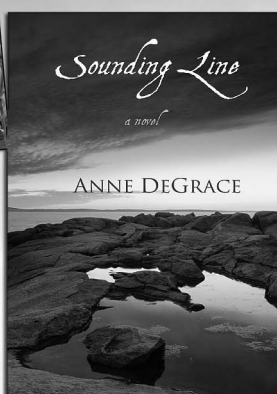
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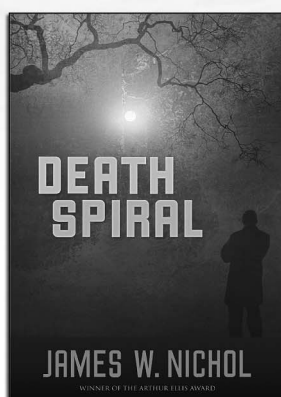
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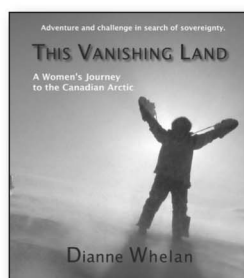
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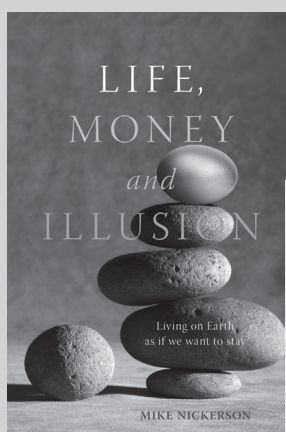
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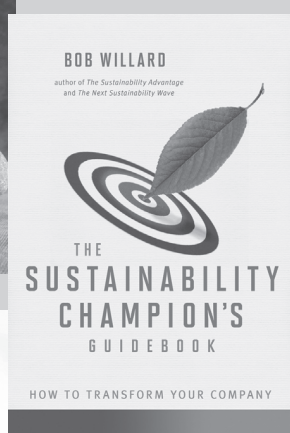
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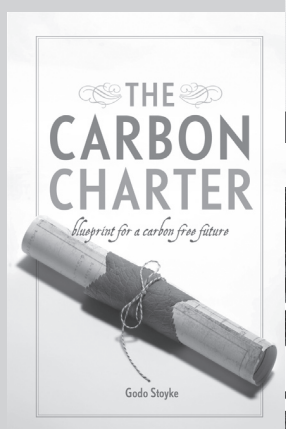


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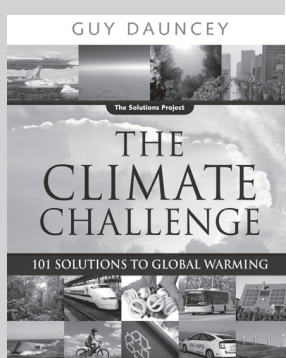
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Andrew Scott gets "wet launched" from the deck of
the *Uchuck III* in Tahsis Inlet.

PUBLISHED IN 1909, *British Columbia Coast Names* by Captain John T. Walbran is a classic of B.C. literature. As skipper of the federal lighthouse tender *Quadra*, Walbran researched coastal place names by exploring remote channels, often interviewing or corresponding with many of the province's pioneer residents and mariners.

For the past several years, **Andrew Scott** has kayaked in Captain Walbran's wake, gathering new information for a follow-up text that surpasses Walbran in both size and depth.

More than 2,000 new B.C. place names have been added to the coast in the 20th century, so Scott's text is not a rehash of Walbran. He has supplied the origins and meanings of more than 5,200 names, with photos and maps.

Visitors to **Balcom Inlet** might like to know a **Rudyard Kipling** short story is supposedly based on the ordeal of sealers **Sprott Balcom** and **William Hughes**, who were imprisoned in Russia for alleged illegal hunting, stripped of their possessions and money, and had to scrounge their way home to Victoria via Japan.

Similarly, boaters near **McLean Island** will surely appreciate knowing that sealing skipper **Alex McLean**, whose gigantic moustache could be tied behind his neck, was rumoured to be the model for Wolf Larsen in **Jack London's** novel *Sea Wolf*.

To celebrate the centennial of Captain John T. Walbran's groundbreaking work on coastal names of B.C., Sechelt-based **Andrew Scott** has produced a 650-page lighthouse of a book, *Raincoast Place Names: A Complete Reference for Coastal British Columbia* (Harbour \$49.95), destined to stand tall for decades.

Selma Park is named for the *Selma*, a pleasure palace turned coastal steamer. Its former owner, Sir **Henry Paget**, held mad parties aboard, some of which featured excessive behaviour by the likes of **Prince Edward** and actress **Lily Langtry**. Renamed *Chasina*, the vessel became a rum-runner and then disappeared in 1931, along with its crew of 11, en route from Hong Kong to Macao.

The Union steamship *Cutch*, another former private yacht, was built for an Indian prince, the **Maharaja of Cutch**. It ran onto this rock now called **Cutch Rock** in 1899 and ended its days as a gunboat for the Colombian navy.

The name **Kiln Bay** has nothing to do with kilns. It's a misspelling. The feature commemorates US artist **Wilfred Kihn**, who specialized in documenting First Nation cultures and travelled up the Skeena River in 1924 to sketch Gitksan poles and carvings near Hazelton.

There are lots more such errors enshrined on the maritime charts. South of Calvert Island, it's easy to run aground on **Pearl Rocks**. Early fur trader **James Hanna** called them, with good reason, the Peril Rocks. Peril somehow got changed to Pearl on **Captain Vancouver's** chart.

Alert Bay is named for HMS *Alert*, which spent seven years patrolling the B.C. coast in the 1850s and '60s. It went on to lead a famous British mission to the high Arctic, chart Magellan Strait, help rescue the lost polar expedition of Adolphus Greeley, survey Hudson Bay and supply the lighthouses of Nova Scotia before being broken up in 1894.

Lucy McNeill, daughter of Hudson's Bay Company official **William McNeill** and his first wife, **Mathilda**, a Kaigani Haida chief, was a "miraculously unfettered Victorian female," according to B.C. memoirist **Helen Meilleur**. "She was so adaptable that she could occupy the VIP cabin aboard the *Labouchere* ... and then set off in a canoe for weeks of weather-exposed travel to Indian villages." That's how the **Lucy Islands** got their name.

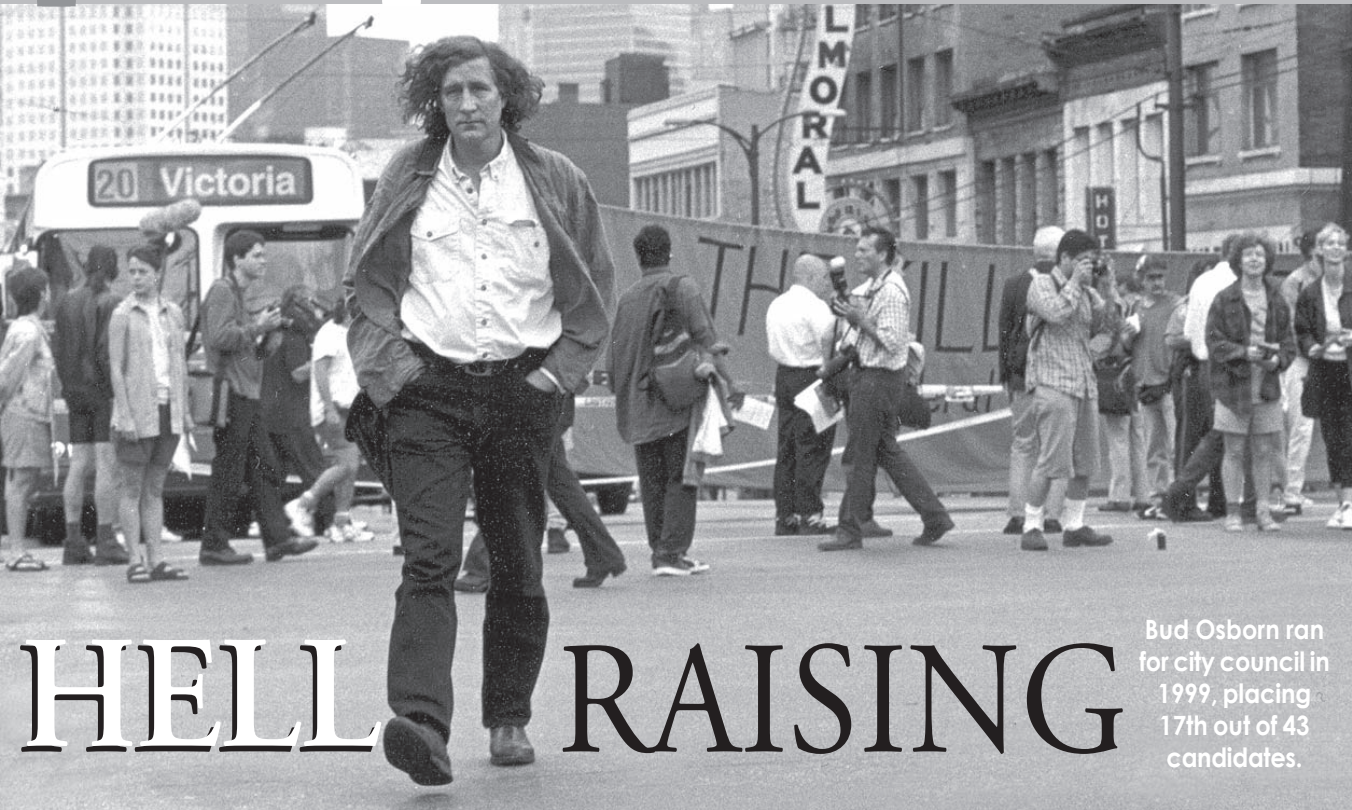
Similarly, **Gillen Harbour** is named for **William Gillen**, a Halifax fisherman, who ran Bamfield's lifeboat station, skippered halibut vessels off Haida Gwaii and took the legendary *St Roch* on its first voyage to the Arctic. Gillen became an Arctic specialist, running supply ships for the Hudson's Bay Co, before mysteriously drowning in Vancouver Harbour in 1930.

There are not any Butthead Islets but there are **Beavis Islets**. **Lancelot Beavis** joined the great clipper ships as a youth. He was captain of the *Micronesia*, which burned to the waterline off the coast of England, then served on Atlantic cattle carriers, which he despised, did marine survey work on the B.C. coast and trained sailors at Esquimalt in World War I. Beavis ended up operating ferries to West Vancouver before retiring to write his memoirs, *Passage from Sail to Steam*.

Passing **Lohbrunner Island**, kayakers might want to know **Max Lohbrunner** bought B.C.'s last whaling ship, the *Green*, moored it in Victoria Harbour and lived aboard for 20 years, surrounded by junk. He cleverly evaded the city's attempts to move him until the *Green* eventually sank. Its harpoon gun is in the Maritime Museum.

A former *Western Living* editor (1980-1987) and *Georgia Straight* travel columnist, Welsh-born **Andrew Scott** has also been a *Vancouver Sun* reporter, *Alaska Airlines Magazine* publisher (1987-1989) and a *Globe & Mail* editor (1989-1991). His monthly *Georgia Straight* column called Ecotourism, renamed Coastlines in January of 1998, led to two volumes about his journeys and kayaking discoveries along B.C.'s shores with his partner **Katherine Johnston** who "was by my side (or slightly ahead of me) on most of these journeys."

Happy Walbran Centennial.



HELL RAISING

Bud Osborn ran for city council in 1999, placing 17th out of 43 candidates.

DUNCAN MURDOCH PHOTO

FOR ALMOST TWENTY YEARS **Bud Osborn** has been the unofficial archivist of Canada’s poorest neighbourhood.

“We have become a community of prophets,” writes the Downtown Eastside poet, “rebuking the system and speaking hope and possibility into situations of apparent impossibility.” Along with City of Vancouver’s Drug Policy Coordinator **Donald MacPherson** and UVic academic

Susan Boyd—who lost her sister Diana to a drug overdose—Osborn has documented the social justice movement that culminated in the opening of North America’s first supervised drug injection site in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES).

As a landmark celebration of collective activism and resistance, the trio’s impolitely-titled **Raise Shit! Social Action Saving Lives** (Fernwood \$26.95) is a sophisticated history of despair and courage, commitment and change.

It is also an important contribution

to the serious literature on drug prohibition and an inspiring story of how marginalized citizens have refused to let their friends’ deaths be rendered invisible.

“Our story is unique,” say the trio. “It is told from the vantage point of drug users, those most affected by drug policy.”

At its outset, this montage of photos, news stories, poems by Osborn, MP **Libby Davies’** letters and journal entries does not fail to note: “From the early 1980s, poor women, many Abo-



Unnamed Downtown Eastside resident erects a cross in memory of those dead from overdoses.

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CIRQUE DU FARRANT

M.A.C. Farrant is a trapeze artist of the imagination, swinging over the existential void, says reviewer Sheila Munro.

Down the Road to Eternity: New and Selected Fiction by M.A.C. Farrant (Talonbooks \$19.95)

A self-proclaimed “archaeologist of the absurd,” M.A.C. (Marion) Farrant of Sidney is perhaps Canada’s most ascerbic and intelligent humourist.

Farrant’s stories are not fiction in any conventional sense. Don’t expect to find much character development, or conflict, or plot (in other words, realism) on her pages.

Down the Road to Eternity: New and Selected Stories is a fantastic trip through twenty years of metaphorical and metaphysical imaginings.

Most of the stories are short, some no longer than a page. Other selections are essays, vignettes, stream-of-consciousness musings and internal monologues.

Throughout it is the author’s wild imagination, her willingness to break the rules, that is on display, that creates the fireworks.

It seems Farrant can (and does) write convincingly on just about any subject, finding humour (and pathos) in the most unlikely places.

Where else would you find a conversation between Barbie and her younger sister Skipper, a funeral for a budgie who has committed suicide, or a man serving as material for his wife’s fiction who lives in a cage?



Farrant’s stories can be wickedly funny, but they are rarely clever for the sake of being clever (okay the description of the nativity scene made out of luncheon meat may be an exception).

Generally, though, there is a seriousness, an awareness of uncomfortable truths anchoring the metaphorical flights, and of course this is what the absurd is all about: finding a way to talk about things we can’t talk about any other way.

Farrant is a trapeze artist of the imagination, swinging over the existential void.

We meet a hermit who digs himself a trench as a bulwark against a postmodern age, a man suffering from EDT (end times trauma), street poets facing extinction, and a husband who won’t get off the couch until the polar ice cap stops melting.



The selections from Farrant’s earliest collection, *Sick Pigeon*, though still fanciful, read more like conventional stories than her later ones, with their tales of the lonely and the dispossessed.

One story is about a nineteen-year-old welfare mother with seventeen cats who barricades

the door against the social workers. They are always asking, “How does it feel, Sybilla, to be on welfare? Oh terrific. No, really Sybilla, how does it *really* make you feel?”



In her second collection, *Raw Material*, Farrant unleashes her genius for the absurd. Her writing becomes more daring, more zany.

In *The Comma Threat*, a woman is giving away commas. “I gave some to my aunt to decorate her curtains; she flung handfuls of them against the drapes hoping for a **Jackson Pollock** effect.”



SHEILA MUNRO

When all the commas are gone, the piece turns into one long run-on sentence.

Bright Gymnasium of Fun is an absurd riff on the people who make laugh tracks. Who are these people? Who pays them?

Without them, how would we know what is funny?

One of the funniest stories, *The Heartspeak Wellness Retreat*, spoofs the pseudo-profundity of New Age beliefs. The characters include a couple who consult a book called *Instant Feng Shui*. They decide they must bomb their house to get rid of bad karma.

Farrant frequently invokes the names of the great masters of literature and art, musing on the works of **Blake, Borges, Nabokov, Chekhov, and Georgia O’Keefe**, among others. Sometimes she writes stories about actual writers, one involves eating beans with **Leonard Cohen** and another recounts **Dorothy Parker’s** rounds of cocktail parties at the Algonquin Hotel.

My favorite of the stories in this vein is *Alice & Stein*, a mini-biography of the literary icon **Gertrude Stein** and her life partner **Alice B. Toklas**.

Stein, who is busy “building platforms” for herself from which to make her pronouncements on art, is juxtaposed with her amanuensis (Alice) who sweeps floors and types manuscripts, but nonetheless manages to have her own “white wine with breakfast” period.

The reader is left wondering whose life has been better, the one who creates, or the lover who loves.

The selections from the most

recent work, *North Pole*, tend to be more philosophical as the mature artist contemplates the diminishing days, struggles to define what writing should be, and considers the surreal prospect of the nursing home.

But shot through the darkness are explosions of light: small epiphanies, unexpected revelations, quiet affirmations.

“There are times when the experience of living in this world is rapturous. And there are times when it curls us crying in our beds. Between these extremes we tell each other what we know...”

987-0-88922-615-9



A new collection of Farrant’s personal essays on family life, *The Secret Lives of Litter Bugs* (Key Porter Books \$17.95) was also published earlier this year. These complement her coming-of-age memoir, *My Turquoise Years*, published in 2004.

Sheila Munro is a freelance writer in Powell River.



In one of M.A.C. Farrant’s stories we meet an old hippie who has had the misfortune to read Camus on acid in his youth and now spends his life dancing alone to stave off mortality.

GREAT SCOT, GOOD KNIGHT

Robert the Bruce meets the Templar Order in Jack Whyte's trilogy clincher

BY CHERIE THIESSEN

Order in Chaos, Book Three of the Templar Trilogy by Jack Whyte (Penguin Group \$38)

The Knights Templar was a union of fighting monks, founded by **Hugues de Payens** in 1118, ostensibly with the aim of protecting Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land.

But it's quite possible its agenda also included the recovery of treasures stored beneath the ruined Temple of Solomon by fleeing Jews after the Roman siege of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD.

These were not your everyday trinkets and treasures. We're talking about the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant, objects the Catholic

Church would have been desperate to uncover or possibly cover up.

No wonder **Jack Whyte** couldn't resist. The Templar knights have always fascinated, and dozens of books of fiction, history, fantasy and mystery have been written on the subject, long before **Dan Brown's** *The Da Vinci Code*. Heroic characters, mysteries, quests for hidden treasure, secret rituals, battles and betrayals...

Of Scottish origin, Whyte may have been drawn to speculate that the surviving knights took sanctuary in Arran, a remote area of Scotland, loosely under the rule of the excommunicated King **Robert the Bruce**, a famous warrior and Scotland's greatest king (1274-1329).

Much of *Order of Chaos* is based on possible fact. The Templars' exile could have been real, for example, as carvings in Scotland's Rosslyn Chapel seem to depict certain Templar rituals.

Jack Whyte's *Knights of the Black and White*, released in August 2006, and *Standard of Honor*, released one year later, have chronicled the Templar origins through its founder, Hugues de Payens, and the ongoing Crusade adventures of three members of the St. Clair family.

Those who have read the first two books will be eager for this final novel.

In Book Three, Sir William St. Clair has a lot on his shoulders. France's greedy and devious King **Phillipe IV** has pounced on the Templar, seized

its assets, and imprisoned its knights.

Grand Master Jacques De Molay has been snatched and is now at the mercy of the Inquisition. After more than two hundred years of prosperity and service to church, king and country, the Order of the Temple of Solomon is about to come to an end.

Not all is lost, however. St. Clair, alerted by De Molay, has managed to spirit away a large fleet based at La Rochelle, taking the Temple's famous treasure with him, along with a thousand knights.

★

In *Order of Chaos*, Sir William St. Clair and his knights manage to overcome enormous obstacles and to thrive in their exile, forming close relationships with the

Scottish king, Robert the Bruce, and his close friend, Sir **James Douglas**. Both the king and Knight Templar are on shaky ground.

Robert the Bruce must oust the British and their supporters from his lands. His excommunication from the church for a perceived murder in Dumfries before the high altar has not helped matters.

Sir William must keep order and morale high within his ranks, conceal their true identity, and face an unknown future.

In spite of the ultimate death of the Templar's last Grand Master, who is burnt at the stake, and the subsequent realization that the order is finished, and can never again return home, optimism lingers.

There is a cumulative battle in full Knights Templar regalia, during which our heroes attempt to defeat British invaders in the face of overwhelming odds. We hope that St. Clair will be able to sail off to a distant land called Merica with his ladylove, the feisty widow, Lady Jessica Randolph.

★

This is a meaty book, full of details you wouldn't expect to find in an adventure so action-packed: what the knights wore, every layer down to their skin, for example, and how ladies of the period prepared their makeup and hair.

Several pages are devoted to Sir William's solitary bathing in the sea and his convoluted preparations for drying himself. I'd rather the pages were spent in bringing me up to speed on what is happening to Tam, Sir William's invaluable aide and the most intriguing character in the book. After such a strong entrance, he resurfaces only occasionally.

Like a Greek tragedy, much happens in-between the chapters, often the really exciting stuff, like the decisive Battle of Bannockburn. (In 1314, the Battle of Bannockburn was won when a Templar force led by Sir William St. Clair came to Robert the Bruce's aid; and thereafter Scotland remained an independent kingdom for 289 years.) There is also the revelation of the origins of the battered ship William spies following his solitary swim. All of it is learned second-hand, in true Greek messenger style.

But, to be fair, 'showing' might have made this 600-pager even weightier, and how much action can a reader withstand?

Word is that this indefatigable Kelowna author has another trilogy underway, to be called *The Guardians of Scotland*, set in the 14th century during the Scottish Wars of Independence. The Templars have made their fictional exit with *Order in Chaos*, but we can look forward to seeing more of Robert the Bruce and James Douglas.

9780670045150

Cherie Thiessen reviews fiction from Pender Island.



Jack Whyte (above) and Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

Ian Weir's pugilistic parable about a preacher who wants to KO the Devil would be a perfect follow-up vehicle for Mickey Rourke's The Wrestler



BY **CHERIE THIESSEN**
Daniel O'Thunder by Ian Weir
(Douglas & McIntyre \$29.95)

Laced with blood, thunder, sex, murder, rape, mayhem and miracles, **Ian Weir's** first novel is about good versus evil.

It's the vibrant story of a has-been boxer named Daniel O'Thunder who makes a Lazarus-like comeback to fight for Christ.

Rocky Balboa goes to Dickensian London and gets religion.

★ Fighting with fists has

been a sport ever since the early Romans, and the Brits raised it to a national pastime in the 19th century when illegal bare-knuckle bouts were usually ignored by authorities unless a competitor was killed.

From multiple narrators we learn O'Thunder is a battered one-time boxer, an army deserter and a reformed drunk. When he's not preaching or consoling his mission of fallen souls, he fights for Christ with the gift of a golden voice and a fist like a thunder-bolt.

God helps him in both endeavours.

But every good screenwriter knows a good protagonist requires a formidable antagonist, so Weir pulls no punches in that department. O'Thunder hankers for a punch-up with Lucifer himself.

As the chief adversary in this *Book of Daniel*, the Devil is more of a presence than a person, a chimera rather than a character, but his influence is continuous and very real to the hero.

Reverend Jack Beresford, the most-heard narrator, recalls when he himself was a preacher in Cornwall in 1849. By 1851-52, when the bulk of this tale takes place, the not-so-reverend Jack has become Jack Hartright.

He claims the whole story really can be traced back to Biblical times when, for forty days and nights, the son of God spent some time in the desert with that tempter, the Devil.

As **Milton** has already made clear in *Paradise Lost*, all sensitive Satan ever really wanted was to be God's special companion, but he was pushed away, and we all know the results of that.

Most of Weir's characters will transform or reveal themselves in a different light by story's end.

John Rennert, nicknamed Jaunty, is a sleazy, ex-military man who sets up illegal boxing bouts to pay off his mounting gambling debts. He tracks down O'Thunder in an effort to lure him back into the ring.

Another strong voice belongs to Nell, initially the adolescent ingénue, but aged twenty-seven years by the end of the novel. Reduced to whoredom, the belle Nell is searching for the mother she never knew. Like almost everyone who meets him, outside the ring or in it, Nell is struck by O'Thunder's charisma.

A newspaperman in reduced circumstances, William Piper adds his penny-a-word viewpoint, as does his mother and his mother's aide, Dorcas.

From the outset, even if we haven't read the author's biography, we know we are in skilled hands. In the first chapter, Jack writes, "...to tell my story we must begin where it all began to go wrong." What reader can resist reading about all the things that have gone wrong in someone's life?

★

Son of B.C. author **Joan Weir**, Ian Weir has written more than 100 television episodes, several radio plays, and received two Gemini's, a Jessie, and a Writers Guild of Canada Screenwriting

Award for his labours. He was also a writer and executive producer of the CBC series, *Dragon Boys*.

So soon enough you can relax, knowing he's going to hook you, reel you in, let you run, and then release you, only to throw some juicy bits over the other side of the boat to tempt you back.

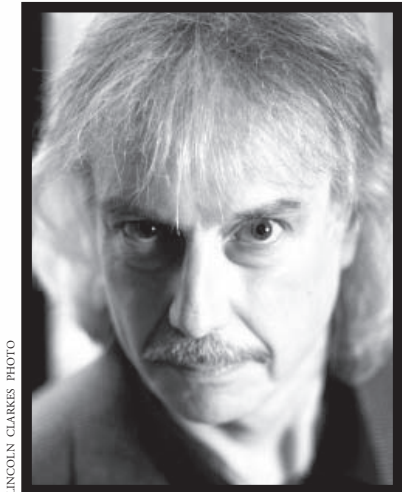
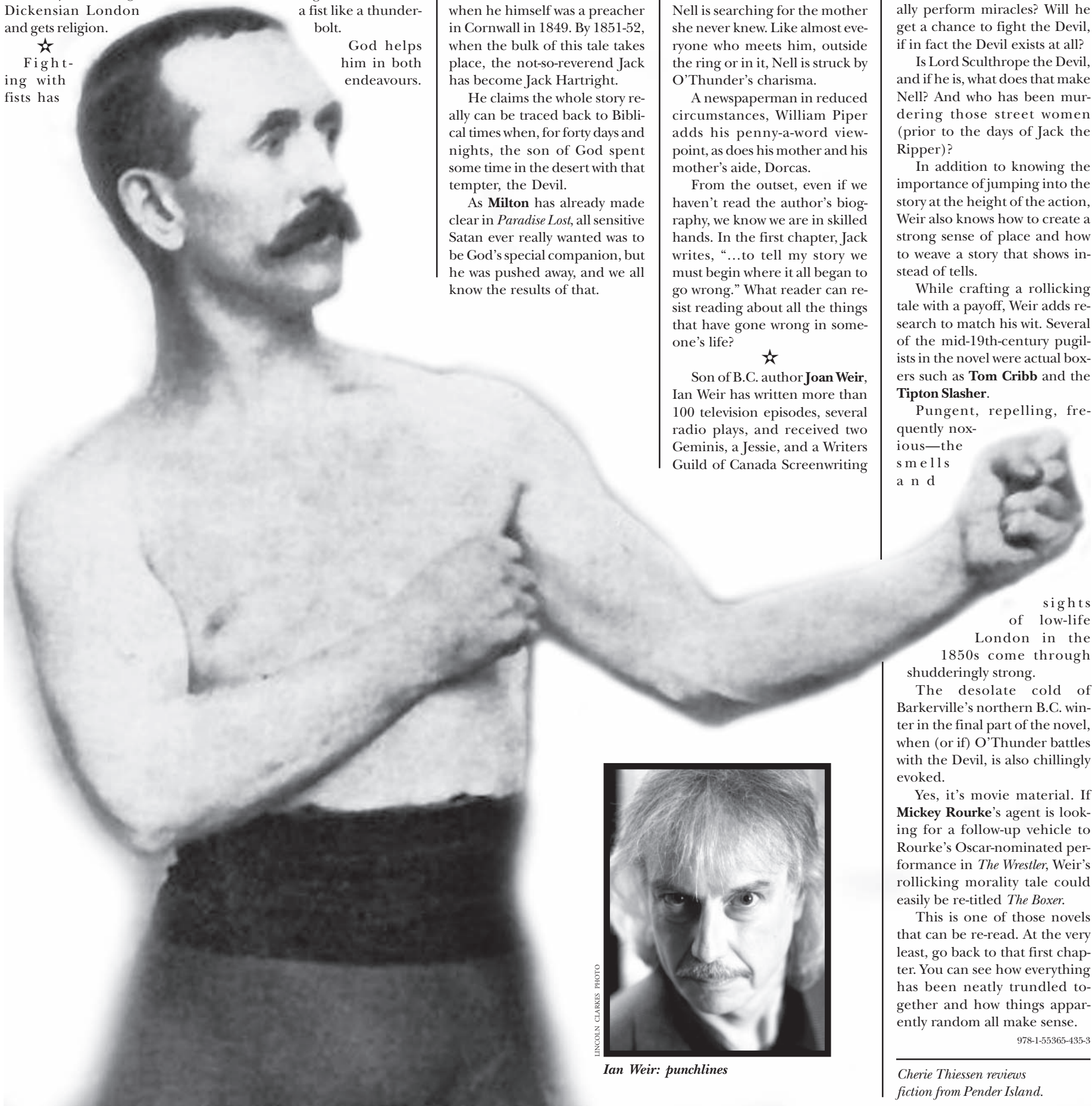
Although the thinking in this novel is modern; the scope of the tale is Dickensian. How divine is O'Thunder? Can he really perform miracles? Will he get a chance to fight the Devil, if in fact the Devil exists at all?

Is Lord Sculthrope the Devil, and if he is, what does that make Nell? And who has been murdering those street women (prior to the days of Jack the Ripper)?

In addition to knowing the importance of jumping into the story at the height of the action, Weir also knows how to create a strong sense of place and how to weave a story that shows instead of tells.

While crafting a rollicking tale with a payoff, Weir adds research to match his wit. Several of the mid-19th-century pugilists in the novel were actual boxers such as **Tom Cribb** and the **Tipton Slasher**.

Pungent, repelling, frequently noxious—the smells and



LINCOLN CLARKS PHOTO

Ian Weir: punchlines

sights of low-life London in the 1850s come through shudderingly strong.

The desolate cold of Barkerville's northern B.C. winter in the final part of the novel, when (or if) O'Thunder battles with the Devil, is also chillingly evoked.

Yes, it's movie material. If **Mickey Rourke's** agent is looking for a follow-up vehicle to Rourke's Oscar-nominated performance in *The Wrestler*, Weir's rollicking morality tale could easily be re-titled *The Boxer*.

This is one of those novels that can be re-read. At the very least, go back to that first chapter. You can see how everything has been neatly trundled together and how things apparently random all make sense.

978-1-55365-435-3

Cherie Thiessen reviews fiction from Pender Island.

LOOKOUT

a forum for & about writers #36

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According to **Don Sawyer**, last year only 45.7 percent of Americans read literature—defined as novels, short stories or poetry. This is a 10 percent decline since 1982, a loss of 20 million readers, largely due to the introduction of home computers. Here he looks at how electronic media is also affecting our children—whose IQs are collectively dropping.

More than 40 years ago, Canadian media guru and philosopher Marshall McLuhan, who coined the term “global village,” saw, with astonishing prescience, how the move from print to electronic media was having, and would continue to have, a profound impact on every aspect of our lives.

The introduction of new communication technologies, McLuhan said, is not a moral issue, good or bad, but one that carries great dangers because of our inability to understand them: “There can only be disaster arising from unawareness of the causalities and effects inherent in our technologies.”

To say that we are living in a rapidly changing world may be the biggest understatement in human history. The internet has only been generally accessible to the public for about ten years. In 2004, 71% of Canadian households owned a computer, nearly twice as many as in 1998. In 2009, more people reported accessing news via the internet than a newspaper.

While the full social effects of this breathtakingly rapid move to electronic media may not be fully recognizable, it is reasonable to expect to see the outcomes first, and most dramatically, in those most immersed in these new technologies, our children. And while the jury is still out, the results are unsettling.

For the first time in a century, children's IQ scores are dropping. A 2008 British study indicates that for those in the upper half of the intelligence scale, average IQ scores were six points lower than 28 years ago.



A study commissioned by Lloyds of London showed that the average attention span had fallen to just 5 minutes, down from 12 minutes 10 years ago, with youth showing the most dramatic declines.

There are indications that increasing use of computer games may result in neurological changes resulting from constant downshifting to primitive fight or flight responses built into most games. These could habituate the brain to a need for extreme experience or even chronically affect blood pressure and anxiety.

The overuse of computers during children's early development may also cause the prefrontal cortex (which regulates emotion, complex thought, and problem solving) to become idle resulting in a lazy or underdeveloped capacity for critical thinking and emotional empathy.

Some studies indicate that the vocabulary of the typical American teen of today is less than half the size of the vocabulary of a teenager in the 1950s, representing not merely a decline in numbers of words but in the capacity to think.

In an American survey, teenagers were able to rec-

ognize over 1,000 corporate logos but fewer than 10 plants and animals native to their locality.

Less than one-third of 13-year-olds are daily readers, a 14 percent decline from 20 years earlier. Among 17-year-olds, the percentage of non-readers doubled over a 20 year period, from nine percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004.

On average, Americans aged 15-24 spend almost two hours a day watching TV, and only seven minutes of their daily leisure time reading.

So what's going on? And what does it all mean? The first question is easier to answer. Dr Richard House, a British researcher on the effects television has on children, puts it succinctly: “Taking these findings [on reduced attention spans] at face value, it appears that there is something happening to teenagers. Computer games and computer culture has led to a decrease in reading books.”

New Zealand intelligence expert James Flynn concurs: “The demands made on teenagers' brainpower by today's youth culture may be stagnating. Leisure time is increasingly taken up with playing computer games and watching TV instead of reading and holding conversations.”

American educator and researcher **Jane Healy** writes, “The way children use computers may have powerful long-term effects on their minds.

The main reason, of course, is that using any medium affects the underlying neural circuitry that is being established during childhood and adolescence. Before parents and educators become too excited about children using computers, the long-lasting neurological impacts must be taken into account.”

Indeed. But can we? McLuhan would seem to suggest that we can't. He tells us that we may be doomed to blunder deeper into the computer age oblivious to the social consequences. At best, perhaps, we can only wonder, as **Samuel Morse** did in the first telegraph message he sent in 1844, “What hath God wrought?” Presumably, time will answer this question for us. But be careful. Those objects in your rear view mirror? They're closer than they appear.

*Don Sawyer of Salmon Arm is the former director of Okanagan College's International Development Centre. His new children's book **The Lunch Bag Chronicles** (Playfort Publishing) grew out of his parenting days. “For years I drew pictures attached to jokes on my daughters' lunch bags. They liked them so much, they brought them home, and eventually I had collected over 1,000 bags. We have incorporated 80 or so, along with a light narrative, into the finished ms.”*

978-0-9813164-0-6

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH

KIDSTODAY?

To honour **Alice Munro's** acceptance of the \$120,000 Man Booker International Prize in June—awarded for a body of work that has contributed to fiction on the world stage—a tribute to **Alice Munro** will open the 22nd Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival on October 18. Alice Munro is scheduled to attend.

MOST ARTISTS END UP imitating themselves. Their art degenerates into a copy of a copy of a copy. Alice Munro has remained a great artist for five decades because her stories are propelled by curiosity. Human nature (not moralism), is always the catalyst, and human nature has endless variations.

Life in Alice Munro's fiction is frequently painful and disappointing—but the reflex of humour can be a crucial antidote, as **W.P. Kinsella** touches upon in his review [see opposite page].

Now 78, Alice Munro raised her three daughters mostly in West Vancouver and Victoria, where her first husband **Jim Munro**, father of her children, still owns and operates Munro's Books. She remains more of a West Coaster than most of her readers realize.

"I like the West Coast attitudes," she told CBC Radio in 2004, "Winters [in B.C.] to me are sort of like a holiday. People are thinking about themselves. The way I grew up [in Ontario], people were thinking about duty."

She has always been a writer. During her acceptance of Man Booker International Prize at Trinity College in Dublin, Munro recalled being seven years old, pacing in her backyard, trying to find a way to make **Hans Christian Andersen's** *The Little Mermaid* have a happy ending.

Her new collection of stories is called **Too Much Happiness** (Douglas Gibson Books, M&S \$32.99). Simultaneously, there is a new edition of **My Best Stories** (Penguin \$22), with an introduction by **Margaret Atwood**.

Alice Munro was born Alice Laidlaw in Wingham, Ontario on July 31, 1931. Her father was a farmer; her mother, a former teacher. When her mother developed Parkinson's disease, Alice Laidlaw handled the brunt of domestic duties but nursed ambitions to become a writer. "I think choosing to be a writer was a very reckless thing to do," she told CBC's **Shelagh Rogers** in 2004, "although I didn't realize it. I was planning an historical novel in grade seven. It gave way to a *Wuthering Heights* novel I was writing all the way through high school."

During her two years at the University of Western Ontario, she published her first short story in *Folio*, an undergraduate literary magazine, and met fellow student Jim Munro. They married in December of 1951 and moved to Vancouver where their two eldest daughters were born. Another daughter died of kidney failure on the day she was born.

In Vancouver Alice Munro befriended **Margaret Laurence**, another housewife who was learning to write, and she was inspired by the success of local novelist **Ethel Wilson**.

In Victoria, where a fourth daughter was born in 1966, she helped operate Munro's Books (est. 1963), considered one of the finest independent bookstores in Canada.

In all, Alice Munro resided in Vancouver and Victoria for 22 years before her first marriage ended and she moved back to Ontario.

After separating from her husband in 1973, Munro became writer-in-residence at the University of Western Ontario in 1974. In 1975, she moved to Clinton, Ontario, in Huron County, with a former university friend, **Gerald Fremlin**, a geographer, partially in order to help look after his mother. Clinton is located approximately 35 kilometres from Wingham where she grew up. (The issue of *Folio* in which she had first published a short story also contained a story by Fremlin, who is slightly older than she.)

Alice Munro married Fremlin after she was divorced in 1976, the year she received her first honorary doctorate (having been unable to finish university due to lack of funds). They now divide their time between residences in Clinton in Ontario and Comox on Vancouver Island.

Encouraged by CBC Radio's **Robert Weaver** since 1951, Alice Munro sold her first short story to *Mayfair* magazine in 1953. She has suggested she might have opted for the short story approach to fiction because she was balancing her duties as the mother of three children, but she also spent many of her formative years as writer trying to write a novel without success.

Alice Munro's first short story collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), received the Governor General's Award for Fiction. *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), which was marketed as a novel and received the Canadian Booksellers Award, was the basis for a Canadian movie of the same name that featured her daughter **Jenny Munro** as the heroine Del Jordan.

Recently **Sarah Polley's** superb cinematic adaptation of Alice Munro's story *The Bear Came Over the Mountain*, renamed *Away from Her* and starring **Julie Christie** and **Gordon Pinsent**, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay.

A frequent contributor to the *New Yorker* since 1976, Alice Munro became the eleventh recipient of the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award for B.C. writing in 2005. She accepted the award, accompanied by her daughter, *BCBW* contributor **Sheila Munro**, at the Vancouver Public Library, where she once worked.

Alice Munro is only the third recipient of the new Man Booker International Prize. Part of her appeal is that her work is distinctly Canadian in a classic 'Who Do You Think You Are?' mold. Typically, she told her Man Booker audience in Ireland that writing, for her, has amounted to "...always fooling around with what you find. . .

In Dublin, Alice Munro reads to her audience at Trinity College, having accepted the Man Booker International Prize.

ALICE HAS NOT LEFT THE BUILDING

This is what you want to do with your time—and people give you a prize for it."

In one of several brilliant stories in *Too Much Happiness*, one entitled "Fiction," a graduate of the UBC Creative Writing program has published her first collection of stories called *How Are We To Live*. The protagonist, Joyce, is an older woman who once gave this girl music lessons as a child. She has realized this up-'n'-coming writer is the daughter of the woman to whom she lost her first husband when they were all living at a place called Rough River, decades before.

Curiosity sends Joyce to the author's book launch at a North Vancouver bookstore. Classically Canadian, Munro writes, "Joyce has never understood this business of lining up to get a

glimpse of the author and then going away with a stranger's name written in your book."

The self-confident young author [possibly a self-parody of Munro as a young writer?] has written a story that completely documents the domestic complications she witnessed, the intrigues that led to Joyce's divorce, and yet she does not recognize her former music teacher in the flesh. There is a poster of self-centred first-time author wearing a little black jacket, tailored, severe, very low in the neck and, Munro adds, "Though she has practically nothing there to show off."

The inexperienced writer has simply reiterated reality without going to the trouble of fictionalizing it, adding nuances of her own. This writer "...sits there and writes her name as if that

is all the writing she could be responsible for in this world." This is as scathing as Alice Munro gets.

Then there is a reprieve for the reader, a line break. The once-jilted Joyce, who has since remarried to a 65-year-old neuropsychologist, leaves the book launch. Alice Munro adds her final paragraph. "Walking up Lonsdale Avenue, walking uphill, she gradually regains her composure. This might even turn into a funny story that she would tell some day. She wouldn't be surprised."

Munro doesn't write whodunnits like **Agatha Christie** but she does reveal the mysteries of behaviour. Conventional thinking is never enough.

EVERYTHING IS FUNNY

REVIEW BY **W.P. KINSELLA**

Too Much Happiness by Alice Munro
(Douglas Gibson Books / M&S \$32.99)

I'll never forget what **Alice Munro** said to me the first time we met. She had come to Calgary to read. I purchased her book, I believe it was "The Moons of Jupiter," and thoroughly enjoyed it, but it had not occurred to me that most of the stories contained a lot of humour. The audience laughed heartily at the story Alice read, one I had read in all seriousness. I said to her after the reading, "It never occurred to me that your story was funny."

Her reply was, "Bill, everything is funny." Her new collection, *Too Much Happiness*, contains ten delectable stories that are as good as anything she has written in her long career. The collection is vintage Munro in that many of the stories are novels, covering years and lifetimes, condensed to their tasty essence. The language as always is crisp and clear, like the tinkling of bells. Reading becomes a compulsion: one has to find out what is going to happen.

In "Deep-Holes," the character Sally has to deal with a son, who at age 9 falls into a deep hole and is rescued by his father. The boy becomes a strange, troubled, possibly insane adult, who disappears for years at a time. Here Munro comments on the difficulty of possessing specialized knowledge and how this era of the internet diminishes that knowledge. When her son was young they scoured books for information on obscure and isolated islands like Tristan da Cunha. Years later, wanting to brush up on those details, she thinks of the encyclopedia, but ends up on the internet where every imaginable fact about Tristan da Cunha is displayed. She no longer has secret knowledge, and feels a terrible disappointment.

In the opening story "Dimensions," Doree's husband is in an institution for the criminally insane, having committed an unspeakable crime. Still, Doree visits him, unable to break the control he wielded over her. She listens to his manipulative ramblings and is tempted to accept his babble of other dimensions. She returns to reality literally with a crash, when she happens on an accident scene, and takes control of her own life by saving the life of a young accident victim. The language is striking: "A trickle of pink foam came out from under the boy's head, near the ear. It did not look like blood at all, but like the stuff you skim off from strawberries when you're making jam."

The story "Fiction," my favorite in this exemplary collection, deals with the question of what is fact and what is fiction, and does a writer really know where a story comes from? Or, for that matter, what a story is really about. I'm reminded of **Henry James** protesting that *The Turn of the Screw* was merely an entertainment, negating the volumes of psycho babble written about the novel.

"Fiction" contains some wonderful humor that I didn't miss. Here is Alice Munro describing a self-centred young author's first book: "*How Are We to Live*, is the book's title. A collection of short stories, not a novel. This in itself is a disappointment. It seems to diminish the book's authority, making the author seem like somebody who is just hanging on to the gates of Literature, rather than safely settled inside."

"Free Radicals," the title a strong play on words,

is about a home invasion. The invader, young, dangerous and slightly insane enters the home of a widow living in a semi-rural area. The story sent me running to reread **Flannery O'Connor's** "A Good Man is Hard to Find," the tale of an escaped convict and his pals executing a family in the rural South. In O'Connor's story the sense of menace is palpable, in Munro's it is muted. "Free Radicals" is more about the widow, Nita, learning about herself and what she is capable of, as she concocts a story, trying to win the invader's trust, about committing a murder herself. Only the *deus ex machina* ending is a little too pat, about the only soft spot in the whole collection.

The criminal shows Nita a photo of his family who he murdered earlier in the day. "... it was the younger woman who monopolized the picture. Distinct and monstrous in her bright mummuu, dark hair done up in a row of little curls along her forehead, cheeks sloping into her neck. And in spite of all that bulge of flesh an expression of some satisfaction and cunning."

"Child's Play," the story of two very young girls at summer camp, explores the banality of evil, and how disturbing events put behind us will just never stay in their place.

The title story is vastly different from the other nine, but no less accomplished. The story describes the final jour-

ney of a real life person, Russian mathematical genius Sophia Kovalevsky, a woman who was far ahead of her time, and who was an inspiration to women of her time, and is still a model to aspiring scientists. Her genius was not fully acknowledged. "... they kissed her hand and presented her with speeches and flowers. . . But they had closed their doors when it came to giving her a job. They would no more think of that than of employing a learned chimpanzee."

The Swedish were less discriminatory and she found employment in Stockholm. "The wives of Stockholm invited her into their houses. . . They praised her and showed her off. . . She might have been an oddity there, but she was an oddity that they approved of."

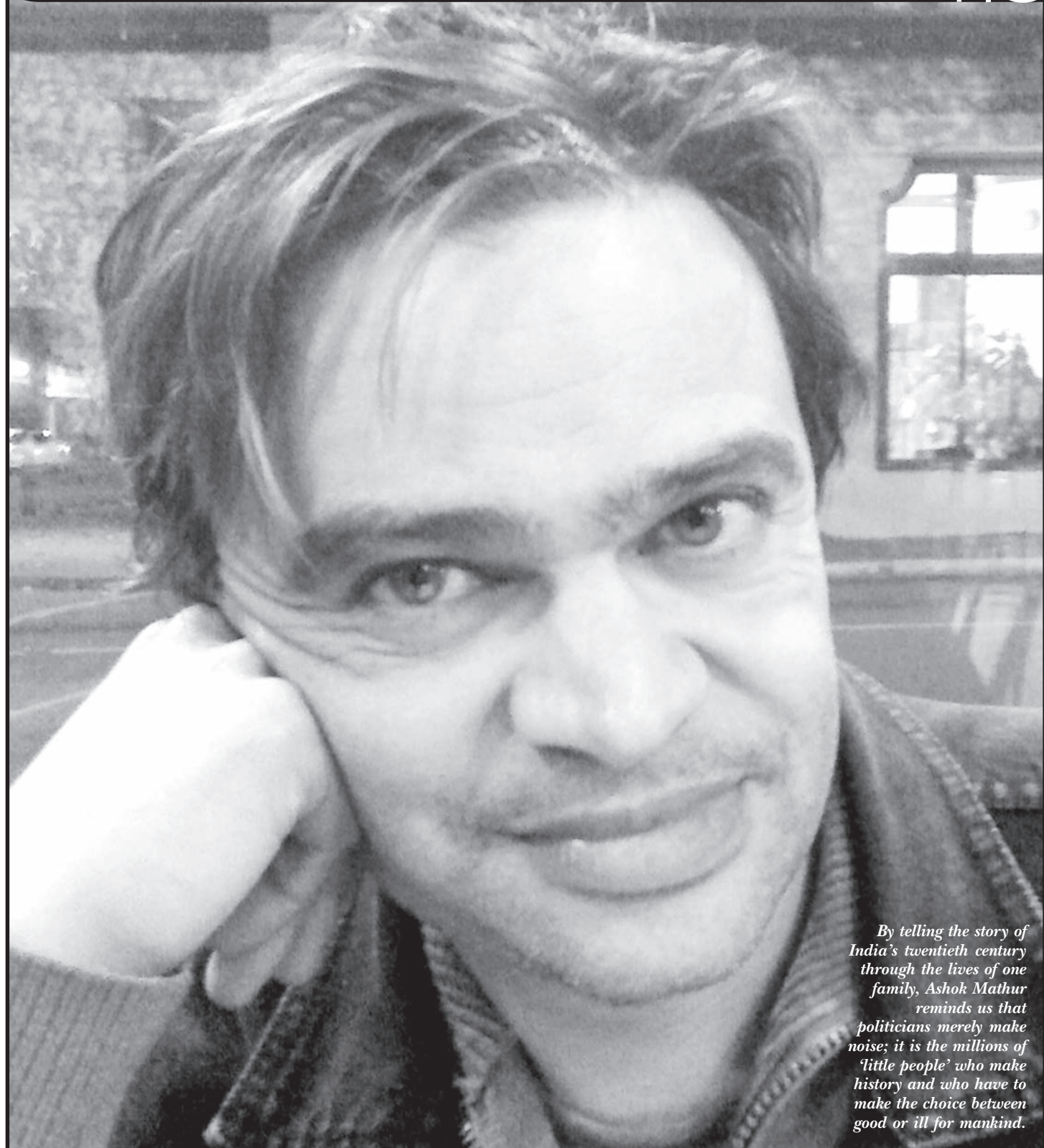
One of the reasons I retired from fiction writing in my 60s, besides feeling that I had said most of what I wanted to say, was that I have seen so many elderly writers trading on their name and turning out pitiful parodies of their former greatness: **Updike** and **Mailer** immediately come to mind. Therefore, it was a relief to find that Munro has not lost a step, and that the quality of this collection matches anything she has written in her long career.

In my 40-some years on the CanLit scene, an industry rife with jealousies, feuds and petty backbiting, to which I have contributed my share, I have never heard anyone say anything unkind about Alice Munro, personally or professionally. When Alice wins a prize other writers and critics are not lined up to name ten books that should have won.

Now Alice Munro has won the prestigious Man Booker International Prize.

In my opinion she and Irish writer **William Trevor** are the world's finest living short fiction writers, something the Nobel Prize people might well consider.

W.P. Kinsella is this year's recipient of the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award.



By telling the story of India's twentieth century through the lives of one family, Ashok Mathur reminds us that politicians merely make noise; it is the millions of 'little people' who make history and who have to make the choice between good or ill for mankind.

A Little Distillery in Nowgong by Ashok Mathur (Arsenal Pulp Press \$27.95)

No fiction is harder to write than magic realism.

Even its evil twin, modern Gothic, is a Sunday stroll in the cemetery; a skein of realism at the beginning, then pile on the gore and let prurience prevail over probability. But to write a naturalistic novel that incorporates and actually hinges on events most readers would consign to the realm of the supernatural requires the sly skills of a seducer, not the maniacal theatrics of a psychotic.

Using nothing but language and without resorting to shock tactics, the writer has to make us believe the unbelievable. One false phrase, one over-arch aside or clumsy sentence, the magic bubble bursts and the whole novel fails.

Done right, as in Ashok Mathur's **A Little Distillery in Nowgong**, it's pure delight, a hot-oil massage for the imagination.



This novel opens with a detailed account of conscious birth, homage to the great-granddaddy of imaginative fiction in English, **Laurence**

A LITTLE DISTILLERY WILL GO A LONG WAY

In Ashok Mathur's audacious second novel, the "massage" is the medium according to reviewer John Moore.

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and an apt overture for a work whose subject is the struggle of a soul to get itself born.

The year is 1899, the place is central India and the boy-child Jamshed, born into the Parsi minority of Indians who follow the teachings of Zoroaster, is not the narrator of his own story. That role belongs to Sunny, a future grandchild of indeterminate sex, whose spirit is able to drop in on Jamshed pretty much from the moment of conception as Sunny attempts to stage-manage the circumstances of its own entry into the 'real' world.

Visitations by a spirit no one can see and only he can hear have a disruptive effect on the life of young Jamshed. He becomes famous in his village for 'going right,' a posture of atten-

tion he adopts when he's listening to Sunny, which others, especially teachers, interpret as a kind of idiotic trance, a problem behavior.

The image of parents sitting uncomfortably in a schoolroom under a ceiling fan whirling like a karmic wheel to endure a parent-teacher conference about their 'difficult' child becomes a recurring drama that links the generations.

Within India's close-knit Parsi communities, Jamshed's reputation for being a bit 'odd' always precedes him, yet it works to his advantage as well, giving him a heightened sense of his own divided nature and of the opportunities presented by India's emergence from colonial serfdom and its accelerated entry into the modern world.

As the son of a *dastur*, a Parsi priest, by tradition he ought to follow in his father's footsteps, yet he is also drawn to the world of business. Though he willingly fulfills his filial obligations and becomes a *dastur*, he also becomes the successful manager of the little distillery of the title, where he literally blends the religious and secular elements of life in the recipe for a marvelous rum called Asha, (Truth), which induces a state of enlightenment in the drinker. (For the record, a friend of mine brought me some whisky from his home town, Chandigargh, which had a remarkably similar effect.)

Over the course of his life, Jamshed develops into the kind of Renaissance ordinary man the world so desperately needs.

The presence of Sunny in his life doesn't give him foreknowledge, since Sunny's future 'existence' seems as uncertain at times as his or her presence is scientifically unverifiable. What it does give Jamshed is a heightened sense of the mission of each human being; to be a good person and to engender and nurture future generations of good people.

Jamshed is capable of great passion. He persuades his Parvin, a customer in the shop where he works, to marry him by very politely threatening to kill himself if she refuses. His belief in the future represented by Sunny also teaches him the patience to endure the deaths of two sons in infancy without undue bitterness.

It is Jamshed and Parvin's only surviving child, the precociously bright daughter Piroja, on whom responsibility for Sunny's existence ultimately falls. She embodies the spirit of the newly independent India, reaching out for freedom and equality while burdened with the weight of history and tradition. Excluded by the latter from becoming a doctor, reluctantly she settles for becoming a nurse, but breaks tradition by marrying Pradeep, a Hindu doctor, after her affair with a Muslim intern founders on the rocks of his refusal to challenge his family's objection to a 'mixed' marriage.

Together, Piroja and Pradeep tend to the victims of the terrible violence that accompanies the post-Independence partition of India and Pakistan. Together they make the difficult decision to leave India, first for England, then Canada, in search of a better place to raise a family. Together, in spite of working long hours, often on opposite shifts, and having to re-qualify professionally each time they move, they make their 'mixed' marriage work.

The job isn't made any easier by Sunny's ability to make trans-generational social calls and he isn't the only spirit Piroja has to contend with. The truculent ghost of her mother, Parvin, keeps popping in to suggest and abet ways she might rid herself of her 'inappropriate' Hindu husband.

Piroja and Pradeep's daughter, the suggestively named Sunila, grows up to become an international recording star of bhangra, the catchy fusion of traditional Punjabi music with contemporary rock that became India's major contribution to the explosive popularity of multi-cultural 'world music' during the last three decades. Sunila's successful musical career is another motif of the reconciliation of differences through 'mixing' Mathur weaves into the story—like her parents' marriage and her grandfather's combination

continued on next page

RICHARDS ON RICHARDS

“When you open your heart, you don’t always know what will come out.”

Death was in the Picture by Linda L. Richards (St. Martin’s Minotaur/Thomas Dunne Books \$27.95)

A classic noir mystery set in the Depression, **Linda L. Richards’** *Death was the Other Woman* introduced her heroine Kitty Pangborn, an ex-debutante whose father killed himself on the eve of the stock market crash of 1929. Having to make a living for herself for the first time in her life, Kitty took a job as a secretary for a hard-drinking gumshoe named Dexter Theroux.

Our unlikely Girl Friday now mixes with Hollywood glitz in the second Kitty Panghorn novel, **Death was in the Picture**. This time Dexter has been asked to help clear the name of leading man Laird Wyndham, the last person to be seen with a young starlet who has fallen from the big screen to the big house. Wyndham’s a dreamboat, but that isn’t the only thing that has Kitty hot under the collar. Her boss has already signed a client for this case—someone who wants him to prove Wyndham is guilty.

Death was in the Picture is Richards’ fifth novel. “When you open your mind, when you open your heart, you don’t always know what will come out,” she says. “You can think you see the story, what kind of box it will be; what kind of magic it will hold. Then when you build the box, sometimes it will hold a different type of magic entirely.”

We asked Richards to reflect further on the writing process, and how she got embroiled in the crime fiction game.



I’m a decent journalist and I’m a good editor but, like a lot of writers, what I’d always wanted to do was write a novel. I made several starts on topics that were important to me, but was never able to ride it through to the end. I know that writing a book is a very different journey for everyone, but for me, the novel form is... well, it’s not that it’s difficult, exactly. But it’s *hard*. It drains me. It takes exactly everything I’ve got. It took me a while to learn that. And it took me a while to learn how to get to that place of supreme letting go.

So there were all these false starts. Stories that were important to me. They were all too big for me, those stories. They were all too big for the writer I was then. But, one day, the shadow of a story crossed my heart and, finally, it wasn’t too big. In fact, in those first moments (hours, days) I thought the words would add up to a short story. About 7000 words in, I realized I had something different. Maybe something more. And I kept

going. Not heroically; it was never anything like that. But I was curious. I wanted to know whose life I was building. I wanted to know where the story would end up.

One day—not terribly far in—I realized I had a book. More: I realized it was a book I’d never thought about writing. Some of the people died. And though there was some laughter—life always has some laughter—sometimes bad things happened to the people in my book. I’d started out telling the story in my heart and ended up with a mystery; a novel of suspense.

Here, Kitty, Kitty: Linda L. Richards with her first Kitty Pangborn mystery

DAVID MIDDLETON PHOTO



Once the book was finished, I was Cinderella. I didn’t have all the pain you hear about writers going through. Once I got down and did it—once I had a finished book in my hand—it all came together in amaz-

ingly stylish fashion. Almost the first agent that saw the manuscript was in New York and she wanted to represent it. Within a couple of months of her taking it on, we had a six figure, three-book deal with a major house.

There have been bumps: I have a different agent now and I’m with another house. And I’ve gotten better at finding the story. Better at building the box. Then delighting at the magic that sometimes—if I’m lucky—seems to flow out.



Born in Vancouver, Linda L. Richards is also the editor and co-founder of *January Magazine*, an on-line publication about books. *Death Was In the Picture* is distributed in Canada by HB Fenn. Richards lives in the Gulf Islands with artist and photographer **David Middleton**.

978-0-312-38339-8

ASHOK MATHUR, CONTINUED

All BC BookWorld reviews are posted online at www.abcbookworld.com

continued from previous page

of religious and secular careers, not to mention the blending of his famous rum.

But is Sunila truly Sunny? You’ll have to read the book.



Mathur takes some acrobatic risks in the manner he chooses to tell what is essentially the story of a family making the big move from a traditional parochial village culture to the Global Village.

Using a disembodied spirit, who exists outside time but still has a ‘personal’ stake in the outcome, to help tell the story is a slick way of getting out of the Omniscient Author/third person narrative bind that can trap a writer into telling too much and breaking the delicate spell of magic realism.

Though the early parts of the

story are set amid some of the most traumatic events of a century destined to be characterized by its horrors, like his characters Mathur resists the temptation to rationalize the politics of the modern age.

One of the most poignant episodes in the novel is the description of Piroja and Pradeep working round-the-clock shifts at a hospital during the Partition, the largest and most violent migration of people in recorded history. They both notice that none of the victims, Hindu, Muslim or bystander, understand why these terrible things happened to them.

Like Jamshed, who politely resists the overtures of his best friend to involve him in the politics of Independence, they learn first-hand how the Us versus Them psychology of modern

mass political movements turns everyone into a potential victim or victimizer.

By telling the story of India’s twentieth century through the lives of one family, Mathur reminds us that politicians merely make noise; it is the millions of ‘little people’ who make history and who have to make the choice between good or ill for mankind.

Ashok Mathur teaches at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, where he is the Director of the Centre for Innovation in Culture and the Arts in Canada.

Not surprisingly, Mathur is deeply involved in world-wide ‘reconciliation’ projects which seek to maximize the effect of the arts to bridge racial and cultural differences so often played on by cynical politicians to cre-

ate fear and distrust. His previous novel, *The Short, Happy Life of Harry Kumar* (Arsenal Pulp Press), was a Commonwealth Writers Prize finalist.

Last words: having recently read Arvind Agoda’s Booker Prize-winning novel, *The White Tiger*, I have to say that while it’s an amusing satire of contemporary Indian life, in my opinion *A Little Distillery in Nowgong* is both better written and a more perceptive book.

That B.C. publishers continue to publish fiction of this calibre, when the brutal economics of the trade and the hostility of government suggest they’d all be better off just publishing cookbooks and self-help manuals, is something we should all be grateful for.

978-1551522586

John Moore writes from Pemberton

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A MIDDLE- AGED GREEN THUMB

From roses to rosaries, Des Kennedy digs deep

Climbing Patrick's Mountain by Des Kennedy
(Brindle & Glass \$19.95)

Patrick Gallagher is a fortyish Irish bachelor whose only love is his garden in Southlands, equestrian playground of Vancouver's landed gentry.

Bootless and unhorsed, he lives in the posh neighbourhood on the sufferance of a landowner who provides a cottage and greenhouse on the grounds rent-free in return for his tenant's botanical expertise.

That expertise is prodigious. Gallagher spends weeks, months and years meticulously cultivating exquisite roses prized by fanciers across the country and beyond. His "introductions" are renowned equally for the delicacy of their blossoms and the delicacy of their names.

Gallagher christens his gardening creations for certain attributes of his favourite female entertainers: Shania's Thighs, Pamela's Panties, Nicole's Knickers and so forth. He speaks to them with a lover's affection while guiding their pollination, in passages that are at once scientific and unabashedly erotic:

"With utmost delicacy he touched Nicole's exposed anthers with the tip of his little finger and then ever-so-gently rubbed the fingertip against Michelle's sticky stigmas. 'Ah,' he sighed breathily at the sensuous touch that marked the moment of pollen transference."

He is utterly content with his sliver of fame, his modest home and his verdant laboratory—until his sponsor dies.

The owner's son wants to develop the property for housing, leaving Gallagher in a panic. Desperate for "dosh," he agrees to return to Ireland as the hired pro for a garden tour on the chance that he might find among his charges a female patron of a certain age and position—a financial strategy only slightly less pathetic than his weekly Lotto ticket.

Although it's a week in his homeland, with expenses paid, plus two grand in his pocket, it's not a prospect he relishes. Gallagher has done his best to forget his family, his boyhood sweetheart and his not-so-savoury pals, all of whom he has betrayed in one way or another. But it has been twenty years and more, and he reckons that if he keeps his head down he might emerge from the tour none the worse off and possibly better.

There, in a geranium pot, are the seeds of the tale—and who better to tell it than Irish-born gardening ace **Des Kennedy**?



Based on Denman Island, Kennedy is a popular speaker, broadcaster and writer on all things green and growing, with a résumé that includes a gar-

dening column, four books of essays and two novels.

Author and character share the gift of the gab, and there are a few touches of broad humour, as one might expect from a three-time Leacock Award nominee. Gallagher can spin a comic yarn to impress the ladies, slathering on the Paddyisms—Jaysus, poxy, bollixed—like butter on soda bread, stopping just short of "faith and begorrah."

(For someone born in the mid-1960s in Cork, the most southerly and fiercely republican county in Eire, Gallagher is strangely given to Scots-Irish terms—"blootered" for drunk, "gossoon" for lad—popular in Northern Ireland half a century earlier.)

Kennedy has a whiff of what writer **Conor Cruise O'Brien** called the "gift—traditionally esteemed and feared in Ireland—of saying wounding things in a memorable manner."



SHANE McCUNE

We snicker at the officious tour guide whose cell phone ringtone is "The Happy Wanderer," and at the plump tourist who wags her finger "so that her bracelets jangled and the dangling fat of her arm wobbled like a water-filled balloon."

But this is neither a comic nor a sentimental portrait of the auld sod. From the moment Gallagher sets foot in Ireland he feels the ghosts that would undo him closing in, and his blarney and bonhomie soon succumb to darkness.

Instead of gushing descriptions of the countryside and its many hues of green, there are sharp observations of downtown Dublin, "where tourists swarm like spermatozoa up onto Grafton Street." There's a nod to the modernity and wealth (since collapsed) of the "Celtic Tiger" but there are still corners plagued by the cassock and the gun.

Kennedy propels his narrative mainly through dialogue, but he also has a way with a telling detail: the progress of a sowbug across Gallagher's kitchen counter while he's on the phone, the wind rattling a loose piece of metal during a chilling interrogation.

The supporting characters are minimally limned, appearing only to play off Gallagher. The protagonist himself is unremittingly weak, cowardly and self-absorbed, and it's a measure of Kennedy's craft that we care what happens to him.

There's a sudden left turn in both plot and voice at the last, in the chapter that explains the title, however opaquely. It's a bit of a head-scratcher, but to say more would give away too much.

9781897142394

Shane McCune writes from Comox where he much prefers Guinness to gardens.

Des Kennedy

has a whiff of what writer
Conor Cruise O'Brien called the
"gift—traditionally esteemed and
feared in Ireland—of saying
wounding things in a
memorable manner."



Douglas Coupland

Generation A by Douglas Coupland (Knopf \$32.95)

With honey bees almost extinct, **Douglas Coupland**’s *Generation A* starts when five people around the world are stung simultaneously. As a deliberate reflection of his famous first book, *Generation X*, Coupland’s slightly futuristic novel takes its title from comments made by **Kurt Vonnegut** at a Syracuse commencement ceremony in 1994, “Now you young twerps want a new name for your generation? Probably not, you just want jobs, right? Well, the media do us all such tremendous favours when they call you *Generation X*, right? Two clicks from the very end of the alphabet. I hereby declare you *Generation A*, as much at the beginning of a series of astonishing triumphs and failures as Adam and Eve were so long ago.”

978-0-307-35772-4

Dragging the River by Trevor Clark (Now or Never \$15.95)

A former “oilrig roughneck,” **Trevor Clark** is equally at home on the mean streets of big cities. His works of fiction include stories in *Born to Lose* (ECW Press) and a new novel *Dragging the River*, the story of a

down-and-almost-out warehouse worker named Lane Courtney. After an affair with a volatile stripper who becomes pregnant, Courtney cultivates raising the profile of the family name by assassinating President **Ronald Reagan**. “I am a universal vagabond,” muses the protagonist. He contemplates putting a .22 in his mouth and blowing all his thoughts against a filthy wall, “but I look at those sparkling lights and I don’t.”

978-0-9739558-5-9



Trevor Clark

The Golden Mean by Annabel Lyon (Random House \$32.95)

Annabel Lyon’s first novel, *The Golden Mean*, imagines the friendship and bond between **Aristotle** and **Alexander the Great**, as narrated by Aristotle. As the novel opens, Aristotle must postpone his dream of succeeding **Plato** at the Academy in Athens when he is forced to tutor Alexander, a prince of Macedon.

978-0-307-35620-8

Seaweed in the Soup by Stanley Evans (Touchwood \$12.95)

The death of a gardener and a policeman’s wife lead Victoria-based First Nations detective Silas Seaweed on a quest to clear his own name and track the killers to the remote islands of Desolation Sound in **Stanley Evans**’ fifth Silas Seaweed mystery, *Seaweed in the Soup*.

978-1-894898-92-8

Basement Suite by Susan Farrell (Cape Breton University Press \$19.95)

After living in Vancouver for many years, **Susan Farrell** has returned to her native Cape Breton with a Master’s degree in creative writing and published *Basement Suite*, a first novel about a couple who participate in a relationship study only to discover they have different interests and don’t understand each other.

978-1-897009-41-3

The Change Artist by Carla Rieger (Anand \$19.95)

Carla Rieger’s *The Change Artist* was written after her father’s death when she discovered a box of his photos, documents and memories indicating he had been a Nazi. In this first novel, a young accountant named Fran similarly discovers her father’s connections to Nazi Germany, as well as his dual occupation as a carnival entertainer in a roving troupe.

978-0-9688272-8-4

The English Stories by Cynthia Flood (Biblioasis \$19.95)

Cynthia Flood’s *The English Stories* is a suite of twelve linked fictions set in 1950s England, as the Empire shrinks into Commonwealth, following the life of Amanda Ellis, a young Canadian girl who goes with her parents to England “for a year that stretched into two.” At St. Mildred’s girls’ school and in a small residential hotel, various narrators depict colonialism’s weakening and its strong residual hold on English, Canadian, and Irish characters. Several stories in the collection have won prizes and/or have appeared in *Best Canadian Stories*.



Rhea Tregebov

978-1-897231-56-2

Illegally Dead by Joan Donaldson-Yarmey (Sumach Press \$16.95)

Author of seven travel books, including *Backroads of Southern Alberta*, **Joan Donaldson-Yarmey** has written a debut mystery novel, *Illegally Dead*, about a travel writer named Elizabeth Oliver who finds herself in the midst of a murder investigation while exploring the Crowsnest Highway between Alberta and British Columbia.

978-1-894549-74-5

The Knife Sharpener’s Bell by Rhea Tregebov (Coteau \$21)

Rhea Tregebov’s *The Knife Sharpener’s Bell* is the story of a girl who leaves Winnipeg at age ten with her parents to escape from the faltering of the North American capitalist economy in the 1930s. They return “home” to Stalinist Odessa, then must flee to Moscow to avoid the approaching Nazi forces in World War II. In the post-war years their family is threatened by anti-Semitism and the repressive totalitarianism of **Joseph Stalin**.

978-1-55050-408-8

The Exclusion Principle by Leona Gom (Sumach Press \$18.95)

About a “semi-functional marriage” and fierce competition among scientists, **Leona Gom**’s 14th title, *The Exclusion Principle*, is a rare novel about astronomy and astronomers, set in B.C. and on the summit of Mauna Kea, in Hawaii, at the James Clerk Maxwell Telescope.

978-1-894549-79-0

The Box by George Bowering (New Star \$19)

George Bowering’s collection of ten short stories mostly about the sixties in British Columbia, *The Box*, is introduced by archival photographs and freely mix writing genres that include biography, autobiography, parable, letters and drama.

978-1-55420-045-0

More House by Hannah Calder (New Star \$19)

Hannah Calder moved to Barcelona, wrote her first novel *More House*, and has since relocated to Vancouver. It’s experimental writing, much concerned with gender. “I was born without a penis,” says the narrator, “... I learned to divide a room into groups—those with penises and those without—at an early age.”

978-1-55420-042-9



Hannah Calder

PETE’S FEAT

Hellhound on his Trail and Other Stories
by **Peter Trower** (Ekstasis \$22.95)

You gotta love a guy who can start a story called ‘Runaway Jill’ with this sentence, and have it be true: “It was 1965, the year I pulled rigging for Big Bart Clapperton on the risky eastern slopes of Goatfoot Mountain.” With an introduction by **Mac Parry**, who published many of **Peter Trower**’s stories in *Vancouver* magazine during that publication’s golden age, *Hellhound on his Trail and Other Stories* is more proof that Trower is one of the few irreplaceable talents in British Columbia writing. Trower’s coastal memoirs in the realm of fiction are unsettlingly from a bygone era, eloquent with a raspy voice.

978-1-897430-26-2



Amanda Hale
My Sweet Curiosity by **Amanda Hale**
(ThistleDown \$19.95)

Described as both scientific and spiritual, **Amanda Hale**’s *My Sweet Curiosity* is another bold, cross-continental attempt from the Hornby Islander to connect individuals from different centuries. Hale combines the life and times of 16th century anatomist Andreas Vesalius with the amniotic memories of University of Toronto medical student Natalya Kulikovsky. In this brave novel that is literally about soul-searching, Kulikovsky simultaneously falls in love with a talented cellist named Dai Ling Xiang. The modern-day protagonist was born only after her mother had five miscarriages and was diagnosed with a hostile womb. She was flushed from the womb three days after fertilization and dropped into a test tube.

978-1-897235-61-4

Grace River by **Rebecca Hendry**
(Brindle & Glass \$19.95)

Rebecca Hendry’s first novel, *Grace River*, is set in a smelter town in the interior of British Columbia. When a young environmentalist arrives to examine toxin levels in the river, locals are forced to contemplate the community’s tenuous future.

978-1-897142-37-0

Finding Carrie George by **Frank LaRue**
(Totem Pole \$18.95)

Frank LaRue’s second mystery novel, *Finding Carrie George*, follows private investigator Mike Morningstar as he tries to track down a girl lost in the seedy world of prostitution and drug abuse in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

978-0-9735840-3-5



Peter Trower’s coastal memoirs in the realm of fiction are unsettlingly from a bygone era, eloquent with a raspy voice.

Peter Trower, Alcazar Hotel, Vancouver, 1978

8 X 10 by **Michael Turner**
(Doubleday \$27.95)

Music groups have concept albums, so why not a concept novel? **Michael Turner**’s *8 X 10* doesn’t refer only to the standard size of a glossy, promotional photo. It’s about the lives of eight people told over ten events. “No one is known by their names,” he writes, “or their ethnicity but by their relationships to each other... and by their occupations.” The year and the places



Michael Turner

are also unrevealed. Namelessness and timelessness, in theory, reflect today’s uncertainty and indecision, war and migration, love and loss.

978-0-385-66593-3

Death in Vancouver by **Garry Thomas Morse** (Talon \$19.95)

Garry Thomas Morse’s stories in *Death in Vancouver* reflect “a transnational, ahistoric cosmopolitanism” as he attempts to rediscover the “theatrical madness” of his mother’s people (the Kwakwaka’wakw) who have become disconnected from the dream-time that existed in everyday lives.

978-0-88922-607-4

From This Distance by **Karen McLaughlin**
(Cormorant \$21)

The second novel by Saltair Island visual artist **Karen McLaughlin**, *From This Distance* takes the form of a one-woman road trip from the Bay of Fundy to her home in Calgary, during which the protagonist Robyn Gallagher comes to terms with her life.

978-1-897151-40-2

Walking on Water by **Jancis M. Andrews**
(Cormorant \$21)

The nine stories in **Jancis M. Andrews**’ *Walking on Water* reflect her residency on the West Coast, as well as her memories of surviving the London Blitz. Her autobiographical Blitz story “Country of Evil” won *Event* magazine’s non-fiction award and was a finalist in the Western Magazine Awards. Other stories are primarily fictional.

978-1-897151-17-4



Jancis M. Andrews

In the Hands of Anubis by **Ann Eriksson**
(Brindle & Glass \$19.95)

Ann Eriksson’s second novel *In the Hands of Anubis* follows a Calgary tractor salesman who, through an unlikely encounter in a Frankfurt airport, embarks on life-changing adventures in Cairo in the 1980s with gutsy septuagenarian named Constance Ebenezer. Born in Saskatchewan and raised in all three prairie provinces, she came to the West Coast in 1978, living for ten years on Galiano Island, before moving to Victoria in 1990.

978-1-897142-35-6



Ann Eriksson

Incident at Willow Creek by **Don Hunter**
(NeWest \$19.95)

Don Hunter’s *Incident at Willow Creek* concerns an Alberta prisoner-of-war camp for German detainees. “After her mother’s death, Liz Thomas inherits the key to a bank lockbox containing the official government documents of Camp 10, a prisoner-of-war camp located in the sleepy town of Willow Creek, AB during World War II. As Liz desperately attempts to piece together reports on a life she never knew her mother had, she discovers a family secret so tragic that it was kept under lock-and-key for over sixty years of Canadian history.”

978-1-897126-41-7

Sounding Line by **Anne DeGrace**
(McArthur \$29.95)

Nelson librarian and journalist **Anne DeGrace** has followed her debut novel *Treading Water* with *Sounding Line*, a story based on a reported UFO sighting at Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia, a media-hyped event sometimes referred to as ‘Canada’s Roswell.’ DeGrace’s version is set in fictional Perry’s Harbour where the town is suddenly beset by Canadian and American military vessels and media.

978-1-55278-797-7

ALSO RECEIVED

Jo Beverley, *The Secret Wedding*
(Signet \$8.99) 978-0-451-22651-8

Sarah Felix Burns,
Song Over Quiet Lake (Second Story \$18.95) 978-1-897187-67-8

Kat MacVeagh,
The Coat in the Woods (Orlebar Point \$14.95) 978-0-9812015-0-4

Christian Petersen,
Outside the Line (Dundurn \$11.95) 978-1-55002-859-1

Vanessa Winn, *The Chief Factor’s Daughter* (Touchwood \$19.95) 978-1-894898-93-5

FROM JUNE TO JANE

Why Loving the Difficult is easy to love

BY EVELYN C. WHITE

Loving the Difficult by Jane Rule
(Hedgerow Press \$21.95)

In 2007, I received a letter from **Jane Rule** announcing the impending publication of her collection of essays *Loving the Difficult*.

Ever irreverent, while battling maladies that would lead to her death, Jane noted that she'd fancied a different title for the book. In so doing, she gave a nod to her activist sister-in-arms, journalist **June Callwood**.

"I heard a story about my friend, June ... [when she was] taken to hospital, unconscious," Rule wrote from her home on Galiano Island.

"She woke, looked around and said, 'Shit! I'm still here.' I thought it would make a wonderful title for my collection. But have been persuaded to stay with the original."

Published posthumously, *Loving the Difficult* has won the 2009 Lambda Literary Award for non-fiction by a gay author.

In her essay "You Be Normal, or Else," Jane Rule discusses what she decried as "the heterosexual cage of coupledness."

"It's an odd moment for [ho-

mosexuals] to want to be legally married," she wrote. "What we forfeit by these ambitions is our greatest strength: we are free to define our own relationships in any way we choose."

This collection also includes, among other topics, Rule's reflections on her paralyzing childhood fear of the dark, money (it "talks") and censorship ("a bad teacher").



Recently the enduring passion and politics of Jane Rule (1931-2007) were also at the centre of a landmark gathering held at the University of British Columbia.

Supported with an anonymous \$1.7 million donation to the Jane Rule Endowment for the Study of Human Relationships, the "Queerly Canadian" conference in early June brought together academics, activists, artists and independent scholars inspired by Rule's lifelong advocacy for social justice.

In a lecture peppered with humour, famed Montreal writer **Nicole Brossard** explored the complex contours of intimacy.

Jamie Lee Hamilton brought her experiences as a self-proclaimed "semi-retired sex trade



Jane Rule's life and career were featured in a four-page B.C. BookWorld supplement, Spring 2008. Visit abcbookworld.com

worker" to a panel discussion of the "golden age of prostitution" in Vancouver's West End when sex trade workers protected each other in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s.

Smith College administrator **Marilyn R. Schuster** shared research from her forthcoming book on the correspondence between Rule and the late *Body Politic* journalist **Rick Bebout**, who died in June, at age 59.

UBC's **Richard Cavell** probed the recurring theme of mourning in Rule's writings. His

insights resonated with me. For all the arch conviviality that Rule exuded from her armchair on Galiano, I often detected an undercurrent of sadness.

Understandably, Jane Rule's solemn air deepened (or so it seemed to me) after the January 2000 death of her long-time partner **Helen Sonthoff**.

In an interview first published in the Autumn 2006 issue of *Ca-hoots* magazine, Rule said: "For two years after Helen died I couldn't imagine why anyone came [to visit me on Galiano]. There was nobody here."

"And people would say I can feel Helen everywhere. I said she isn't. ... There's just this vast emptiness in your life. And you have to learn to deal with it."

As for the rural enclave in which Rule and Sonthoff reigned as cherished icons for thirty years, the community is still grappling with their loss. A friend of the couple observed: "I think some people find it difficult to pass by their house because it's a symbol that triggers memories."

Future Jane Rule conferences and publications will surely evolve from her archives at UBC. Movie director **Donna Deitch** is writing a script that builds on her 1985 film *Desert Hearts*, adapted from Rule's novel, *Desert of the Heart*.

"The new movie will be about feminism in Manhattan circa 1968-1972," she explained to

me, "and will include, as part of the story line, the characters in *Desert Hearts*. It isn't a strict sequel, but expands on my previous film."



I've long been intrigued by Rule's expansive relationship with blacks in Canada and the U.S.

A discerning literary critic Rule was the only person I asked to read my completed manuscript, *Alice Walker: A Life*, before publication. She instantly agreed and offered wise counsel.

Rule was also an early supporter of **Fred Booker**, the late black Burnaby musician and author of *Adventures in Debt Collection* (Commodore Books, 2006).

I was rarely "the only raisin in the cornflake bowl" during visits with Jane. That is to say that Jane welcomed a wildly diverse mix of people into her life.

Moved by her wit, generosity and in later years, veil of grief, we all gladly came. Jane Rule, more than six-feet tall, stood above her peers.

Her 2009 Lambda Literary Award for *Loving the Difficult* seems only appropriate.

978-0-9736882-6-9

Evelyn C. White is the author of Every Goodbye Ain't Gone: A Photo Narrative of Black Heritage on Salt Spring Island. With photographs by Joanne Bealy (Dancing Crow Press, 2009).

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Barbara Ruth Bluman's *I Have My Mother's Eyes: A Holocaust Memoir Across Generations*, is the fourth volume in a series of survivors' narratives published by Ronsdale Press in conjunction with the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. Each of these books brings to light previously under-reported incidents.

***I Have My Mother's Eyes: A Holocaust Memoir Across Generations* by Barbara Ruth Bluman** (Ronsdale \$21.95)

I*Have My Mother's Eyes* begins long before the outbreak of war. As the daughter of a successful businessman, **Zosia Hoffenberg** led a comfortable life in Warsaw and fell in love with eighteen-year-old **Natek Bluman**.

While learning business skills in New York, Natek heard U.S. media reports and understood the enormity of the threat to European Jews, but when Natek returned to Poland, Zosia's father dismissed his warnings.

Three months after the German bombs fell on Warsaw, Zosia joined Natek in the countryside. There they were married and embarked on a long journey to freedom. Through Natek's resourcefulness they managed to reach Lithuania, where they obtained visas allowing them to travel by rail across Russia, then sail from Vladivostok to Japan.

Perhaps most significantly, in *I Have My Mother's Eyes* we learn of **Chiune Sugihara**, the Japanese Consul in Kaunas, Lithuania, whose courage allowed the Blumans to escape. On July 26, 1940, Sugihara woke to see a crowd outside his consulate clamouring for exit visas. They were desperate people who knew they would be murdered when the Germans invaded Lithuania.

Acting in defiance of direct instructions from the Japanese Foreign Ministry, and fully aware of the danger to his own family, Sugihara went ahead and issued the visas. In doing so, he saved the lives of between six and ten thousand Jews. Sugihara is honoured with others of the "Righteous Among the Nations" at Yad Vashem.

On June 26, 1941, the Blumans sailed from Yokohama on an aging freighter, the *Hie Maru*, for Vancouver—completing a journey of almost two years. A year later, Natek enlisted in the Canadian army, telling his pregnant wife, "I will never forgive myself if I don't fight against the Nazis."

Zosia's daughter, **Barbara Ruth Bluman**, a distinguished Vancouver lawyer committed to human rights, was in the last



Danielle Schroeder (left) contributed the afterword to her mother (right) Barbara Ruth Bluman's family memoir.

RECALLING THE UNTHINKABLE

Holocaust literature from British Columbia

stages of cancer when she set down her mother's story, interweaving it with her own. An afterword was written, in turn, by Barbara's daughter, **Danielle Schroeder**, following the deaths of both Zosia and Barbara, making this a three-generational family project.

9781553800705

Bialystok to Birkenau: The Holocaust Journey of Michel Mielnicki by Michel Mielnicki & John Munro (Ronsdale \$19.95)

Sixteen-year-old **Michel Mielnicki** was taken to Birkenau, survived a death march, worked in the slave labour camp at Mittelbau-Dora in Germany and was finally released from Bergen-Belsen. The emotional cost on both survivor and amanuensis alike is made clear in his memoir, co-written with **John Munro**, *Bialystok to Birkenau: The Holocaust Journey of Michel Mielnicki* which provides harrowing first-hand accounts of Birkenau, Buna, Mittelbau-Dora and Belsen.

Mielnicki's story ends with a blistering indictment of the callousness of the British liberators, and his discovery on returning to Poland that no Jew was safe there. Born in 1927 in Wasilkow, a few kilometres from Bialystok in northeastern Poland, Mielnicki immigrated to Canada where, from his home base in Montreal, he became known as "Mr. Michel," one of Canada's premier fur fashion designers.

0-921870-77-9

No Time To Mourn: The True Story of a Jewish Partisan Fighter by Leon Kahn (Ronsdale, \$21.95)

Born **Leon Kaganowicz** in Eisiskes, Poland, in 1925, **Leon Kahn** grew up in a shtetl, or village, and lived through first the Russian and then the German invasion. He tells how, at sixteen years of age, he returned to his village and, from the edge of a gravel pit, witnessed the mass murder of the community's women and children, the women being repeatedly raped before being shot. He then took to the forest and joined the partisans in order to carry out raids on German targets. He survived Nazi search parties, Jew-hating Soviet, Polish and Ukrainian partisans and outdoor hardships to emerge at the war's end, along with thousands of

Jews, from the forests.

He explains how the Nazis began by not allowing his people to walk on the sidewalks; they could only walk in the gutters. Belongings were confiscated, yellow Stars of David had to be worn. Most of his village's 5,000 people were eventually killed.

Kahn gave his life meaning by fighting back, but at war's end both Russian and American forces detained Kahn until they could verify that he was not an enemy alien.

He survived and immigrated to Vancouver in 1948, where he worked successfully in real es-

tate, and died in 2003. *No Time To Mourn: The True Story of a Jewish Partisan Fighter* was written after he had become a well-known philanthropist and businessman. Kahn's account is dedicated to his 24 close relatives (including his mother, father, sister, brother and grandmother) who were killed by the Nazis.

1-55380-011-7

A Long Labour: A Dutch Mother's Holocaust Memoir by Rhodea Shandler (Ronsdale \$21.95)

In **Rhodea Shandler's *A Long Labour: A Dutch Mother's Holocaust Memoir***, the scene shifts from Poland to Holland. Shandler went into hiding on a farm, giving birth to a daughter in a frigid pig-sty in December. Her child was whisked away by the Resistance and raised in the safety of a Gentile household.

978-1-55380-045-3

Lillian Kremer, an expert on the Dutch Holocaust, contributed a preface to **Rhodea Shandler's** story. Such prefaces are important because the subjects raised in this series are often contentious ones.

For instance, the recent release of the movie *Defiance*, while it focuses attention on the Jewish partisans, has generated a flurry of controversy. A headline in a Polish newspaper questions whether the partisans were heroes or murderers.

The British journalist, **Anne Karpf**, the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, criticized the movie for depicting the partisans

in combat with the Nazis when, in her opinion, they avoided confrontation and merely tried to stay alive.

The subject of righteous Gentiles is also a contentious one. The debate is dramatized within this series by the contrasting opinions of two of the contributors. Leon Kahn, for example, makes a broad indictment of those who did nothing:

"I believe it is absolutely imperative to mention the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy for their part in the wholesale and unprecedented slaughter of Central Eastern European Jewry. They were well aware of the daily horrors inflicted on Jews by their devout Catholic parishioners. Yet not once did Rome or any of its deputies throughout Eastern Europe raise a voice in protest."

On the other hand, Sir **Martin Gilbert's** definitive *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* contains a broadly inclusive catalogue. He praises members of the clergy, including the Catholic Church and **Pope Pius XII**, for their efforts in saving Jews.

EIGHT MORE B.C. AUTHORS

Born in Warsaw, **Lillian Boraks-Nemetz** escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto and lived in Polish villages under a false identity.

Boraks-Nemetz is best-known as the author of young adult novels that include *The Old Brown Suitcase*, a fictional account of a 14-year old immigrant girl, Slava, who comes to Canada from Poland after World War II. Her suitcase is filled with memories of the Warsaw Ghetto where she left behind her parents and sister.

The girl's problems of adjustment to her new life in Canada as a teenaged immigrant Jew are juxtaposed with her heart-wrenching memories of her lost childhood in Poland. *The Old Brown Suitcase* won the Sheila A. Egoff Prize, among other awards. Other novels in her Slava trilogy are *The Sunflower Diary* (Roussan, 1999) and *The Lenski File* (Roussan, 2000).



Born in Krakow in 1945, **Eva Wydra Hoffman** moved from Poland to Vancouver with her Jewish parents at age thirteen. She describes it as the formative experience of her life.

"The assumption was that we would never go back," she says. "There was a great deal of a sense of rupture about it. The differences between Krakow and Vancouver were enormous. There was a cultural trauma, let us say, during those first stages of immigration."

As the daughter of survivors (not camp or forest survivors), she studied at Yale and received her Ph.D in literature from Harvard. *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989) describes her experiences in Poland and Vancouver.

continued on next page

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★
Irene Watts has won three Canadian Jewish Book Awards. *Good-Bye Marianne: The Graphic Novel* (Tundra \$14.99), illustrated by **Kathryn Shoemaker**, is her poignant story about the Kindertransport that saved ten thousand Jewish children in Germany prior to the outbreak of World War II.

Watts' original print version, about an eleven-year-old named Marianne Kohn in 1938, won the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction and Isaac Frischwasser Memorial Award for Young Adult Fiction.

★
Rhoda Kaellis gathered the experiences of 15 Holocaust survivors over a period of nine months for the fictional story of 12-year-old Sarah Carozo, the

only child of a Jewish family in post-World War II New York City, and Lilly, her Belgian cousin who comes to live with her after her parents have died in a concentration camp. Her book *The Last Enemy* (Arsenal Pulp, 1989) arose after Rabbi **Victor Reinstein** of the congregation Temple Emanu-El in Victoria suggested recording recollections of the Holocaust in 1987.

★
Helene Moszkiewicz worked within the Belgian Resistance and maintained three identities, Jewish, Belgian and German, while working for two years as a clerk in Gestapo headquarters in Brussels. The Germans took control of Belgium when she was 19. "They were so stupid," she told **Geoffrey Molyneux** of *The Province* in 1985. "They thought only in caricatures. You

know, the Jewish man with a long black beard and a large hooked nose. Many of the Gestapo were the dregs. They were just there because they were cruel. The Abwehr intelligence men, now they were bright and you had to be careful when they were around."

While residing in West Vancouver, she wrote her memoirs, *Inside the Gestapo: A Jewish Woman's Secret War* (Macmillan, 1985). Her story recalls false identity papers, helping POWs escape, working within the Gestapo, hearing screams of SS victims, stealing information to rescue Jews scheduled for transport and killing a Gestapo officer. "We heard about the camps from the BBC," she recalled, "but so many Jews seemed to think it couldn't happen to them. You know, it could

happen again. Jews have to be ready to fight."

★
As a social worker in the psychiatric department of Montreal's Jewish General Hospital, **Fraidie Martz** met some of the 1,123 Jewish war orphans whom the Canadian government reluctantly allowed into Canada from 1947 to 1949. Her non-fictional *Open Your Hearts* (Vehicule 1996) recalls how and why these war orphans were brought to Canada. It received the Joseph and Faye Tannenbaum Award for Canadian Jewish History in 1997.

★
Born in Budapest, Hungary, in 1920, **Steve Floris** survived the Holocaust and was later reunited with his pre-war love, Eva. They escaped Soviet-occupied Hungary and went to Austria, where

they worked in UN refugee camps before immigrating to Canada. They owned and operated the Ferguson Point Tea House for many years. His *Escape from Pannonia* (Granville Island Publishing 2002) recalls their lives together.

★
The most important Holocaust author in British Columbia, **Rudy Vrba**, co-wrote the Vrba-Wetzler Report, alerting the Allies and Jews to the true nature of the concentration camps, after he made his remarkable escape from Auschwitz in April of 1944. Vrba lived in Vancouver for more than thirty years until his death in 2006.

Born as Walter Rosenberg in Topolcan, Slovakia, in 1924, he was arrested by the Nazis at age 18, incarcerated at the Majdanek concentration camp, and later (June 1942) transferred to Auschwitz for slave labour.

After his escape from Auschwitz—during which he and **Alfred Wetzler** hid inside a woodpile for several days while guards and dogs searched for them—he joined a partisan group, adopted the name Rudolf Vrba, and fought against the Nazis until the end of the war with a distinguished record.

Vrba was featured in numerous documentary films, most notably *Shoah* by **Claude Lanzmann** and in the series *Man Alive* by CBC. He also appeared as a witness for various investigations and trials, such as the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial in 1964.

In Canada he was called upon to provide testimony at the seven-week trial of Ontario's **Ernst Zundel** in 1985, when Zundel was found guilty of misleading the public as a Holocaust denier. In 2001 the Czech Republic's annual One World International Human Rights Film Festival established a film award in his name.

"It is evil to assent to evil actively or passively, as an instrument, as an observer, or as a victim," Vrba concluded in his memoir *I Cannot Forgive* (1963). "Under certain circumstances even ignorance is evil."

In 1975, Vrba came to the medical faculty at the University of British Columbia as an associate professor of pharmacology, specializing in pharmacology pertaining to the brain.

For more information on Vrba and other authors herein, visit www.abcbokworld.com

Joan Givner writes regularly on biographies and autobiographies. She lives in Mill Bay.



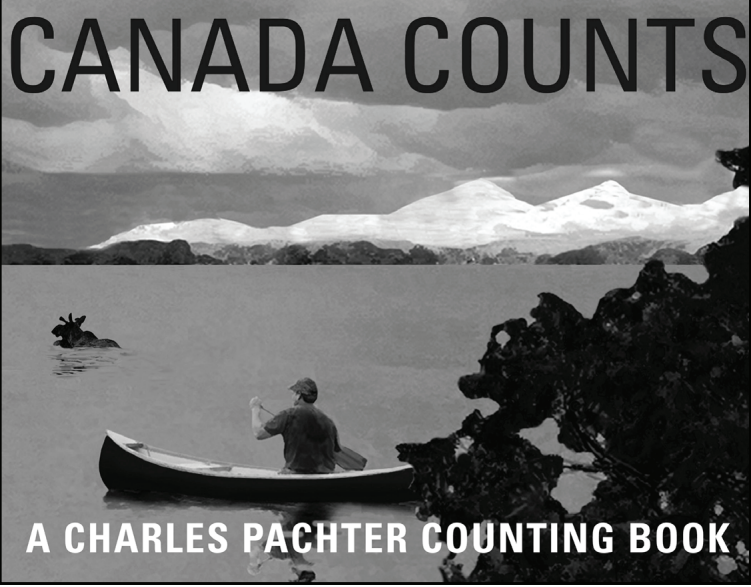
Rudy Vrba

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Kelly Parsons,
Dorothy Field,
Barbara Colebrook Peace

PATTY LOVERIDGE PHOTO

BUDDHA, LORDY, LOOK WHO'S 40

Mixing metaphors and religions, Three Wise Women share their religiosity as Sono Nis enters its fifth decade.

Wearing My People Like a Shawl by Dorothy Field (Sono Nis Press \$14.95)
Duet for Wings and Earth by Barbara Colebrook Peace (Sono Nis Press \$14.95)
I Will Ask for Birds by Kelly Parsons (Sono Nis Press \$14.95)

It was standing room only. Generous bowls of punch stood between floral arrangements. A beautiful appetizer buffet amazed guests and the large crowd had filled every seat at the Victoria Art Gallery.

A famous visual artist being celebrated? No. It was a November night and three relatively unknown B.C. poets were launching their books.

The event marked the fortieth anniversary of Sono Nis Press.

Launched by Michael Yates in 1968, later sold to Dick Morriss of Morriss Printing in Victoria, and now owned and managed by his daughter, Diane Morriss in Winlaw, B.C., Sono Nis continues to publish occasional poetry titles as well as children's books, local history and steam train arcana.

The launch was also unusual because it was for three Victoria-based poets who often write together, and each writes out of

a different religious tradition. Each preceded her portion of the reading with a mini-liturgical of her own faith.

Dorothy Field broke and shared a large *challah*, the braided egg bread eaten on the Shabbat and Jewish holy days.

Barbara Colebrook Peace introduced a vocal trio who sang a Christian cantata-like back-up.

Kelly Parsons used silence and a meditation bell to evoke her Buddhist practice.

Though it is not unusual for poets to have a private religious practice, it is not common for contemporary poets to celebrate their religious beliefs and perspectives quite so openly in a secular setting.

The publishing arms of religious groups may feature poetry and the traditions themselves often use poetry in liturgies and ritual observances, but for a secular publisher to feature this work so prominently, and for the poets to speak without reservation about their spiritual affiliation, qualifies as rare, almost odd.



★
In *Wearing my People*, Field explores her return to, or re-discovery of Jewishness. Her work is largely narrative. It moves from her New York childhood where Jewishness was something to discard, to Jerusalem and to Alabama where her ancestors settled. The family histories are not told in a linear manner.

Three sections divide the book but there does not appear to be an easily perceived rationale for the divisions. Many pieces are prose pieces that, though interesting, lack linguistic subtleties. The poet has provided a useful glossary on all things Jewish which are in part a record of her own reclamation of the richness of her heritage that she was denied as a child. The questions "What is a Jew?" and "Where is home?" are reiterated and they have many answers.

★
In *Duet*, the Christmas story is re-imagined. Like any true (literal and/or metaphorical) good story, retelling it from perspectives other than the conven-

tional one vivifies the story. Though there are some places in the fundamentalist Christian world where this might be considered a desecration, poetry isn't read much by literalists. Retelling is a way of honouring, a deepening. Joseph speaks as well as the donkey. Even the little town has a voice. The sheep wonder if they are more important than they ever dreamed. Although these poems assume a conventional theology of the Incarnation and the role of Judas, their humour and tenderness are a freshly polished story.

Mary speaks, "When I rub my hand in gentle circles/ over your back to make you bring up wind, / I think of the wind/ moving over the face of the water/ at the beginning of the world, / and it was wind and breath and spirit/ All in one word." It takes a skilled poet to bring together baby Jesus' burping with the creation story.

★
At only thirty-three poems, Kelly Parsons' *I Will Ask For Birds* is the slimmest of these new titles but not at all slight. A beach poem follows a monk poem that follows a dog poem. It's an earth-

centered spirituality. There are angel poems but also grandmother-in-the-nursing home poems.

Parsons learns to write with a quill that teaches her patience "a kind of flying / a choreography of the waiting."

Kelly Parsons died not long after the launch of this book. In her "Tea Meditation," she writes, "the sound of the village bell enters into all that is / with its shiny brown voice. This cup contains / the jasmine bud / clinging to the vine / before she is picked / and invited to give up / her fragrance..."

★
There is no universality without particularity.

An Anglican cantata for Bethlehem. Latkes from a wandering Jewess. Monastery quail from a practitioner of stillness.

Congratulations to Sono Nis for forty years of publishing (Diane, please continue to accept poetry manuscripts) and for braiding these three poems.

Duet: 978-1-55039-164-0; Will Ask: 1-55039-165-8; Wearing: 978-1-5539-166-4

Hannah Main-Van Der Kamp writes from Victoria.

GERRY GILBERT

Born on April 7, 1936, Gerry Gilbert for many years hosted *radiofreerainforest* on Co-op Radio and published *BC Monthly*, a writing journal. Along with his photographic and audio-visual exhibitions, he published numerous books of poetry and prose such as *Moby Jane*, *Grounds* and *Azure Blues*. He lived the last 40 years of his life in and around Vancouver's Downtown East Side. He was a noteworthy catalyst for poetry and writing in Vancouver since the 1960s. He was predeceased by his daughter, Lara, whose edited memoir, *I Might Be Nothing: Journal Writing* (2004), alleging many years of abuse, was published by her mother, Carole Itter, after Lara Gilbert committed suicide in 1996. Gerry Gilbert died on June 19, 2009.

GERALD STEPHEN GIAMPA

Born in 1950, Gerald Stephen Giampa was a typographer and fine book printer who died on June 24, 2009. He established The Cobblestone Press and later Northland Letterpress. He also loved and owned classic wooden boats.

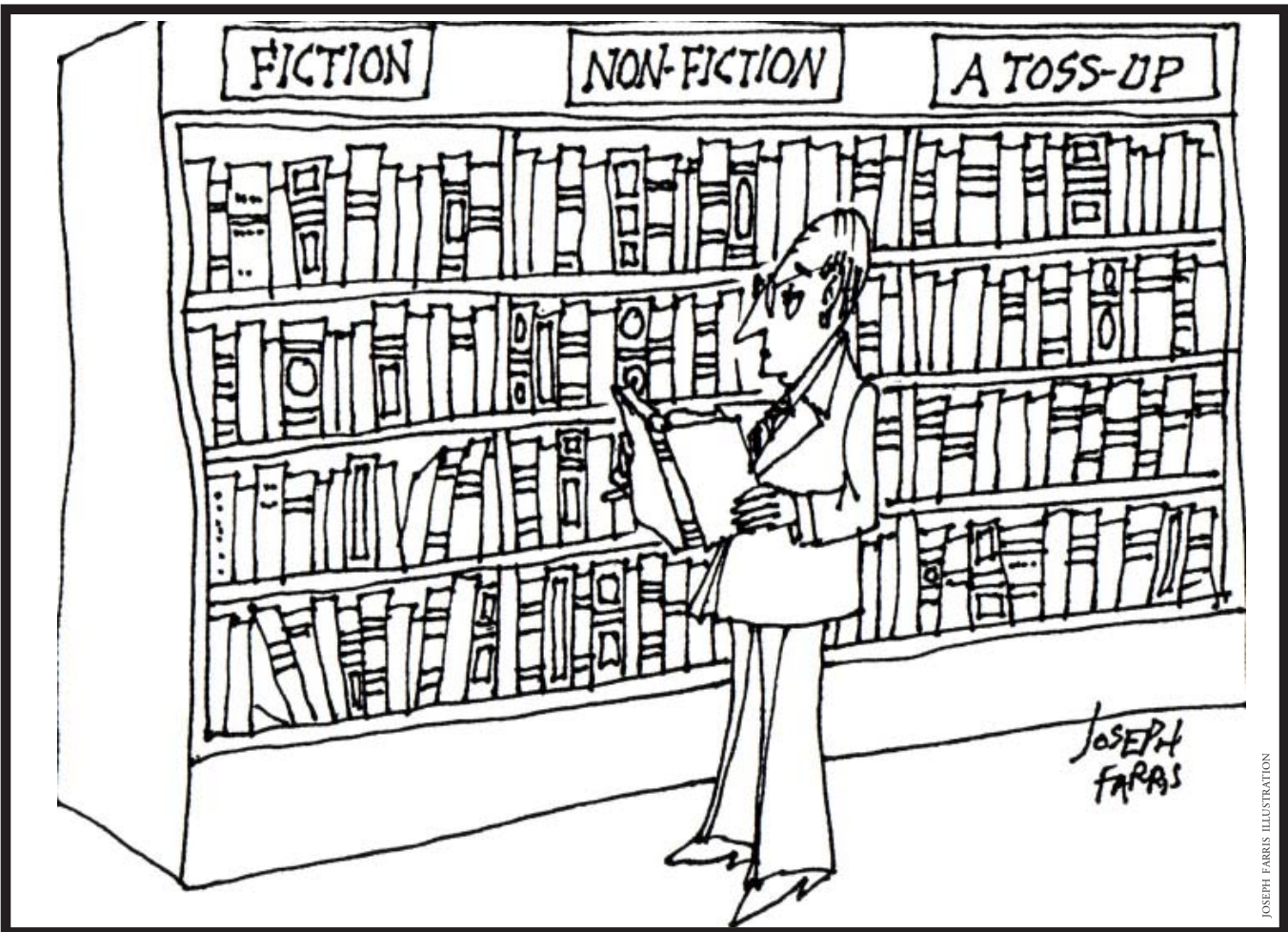
FRED THIRKELL

Born in 1930, Vancouver-raised Fred Thirkell was a collector of early postcards, especially those relating to Vancouver and the Fraser Valley before the First World War, reflecting his keen interest in local history. With co-author Bob Scullion he produced eight books, the most recent being *Greetings from British Columbia, A Journey in Vintage Postcards*, published two months after his death in July of 2009.

GEORGE MATHESON

Born in Bobbili, southern India, in 1931, George Matheson of Kettle Valley Publishing came to Vancouver in 1980 and later moved to the Shuswap, Kelowna, Lumby and Vernon. Matheson first wrote and published *Vader's Caboose*, a railway book about the Kettle Valley Railway and its 40-year employee Frank Vader. A follow-up called *Cactus in your Shorts* (1996) describes the history of the Interior desert country. His third book, *Hogs and Cabbagers*, is dedicated to Pappy Loma, a lonely, hump-backed Eaton's clerk whose only friends were six whores who plied their trade at the old Warwick Hotel in Toronto. Matheson's most ambitious initiative as a publisher was a 544-page history, *Camp Vernon: A Century of Canadian Military History* (2003), by Vernon veterans Hugh Rayment and Patrick Sherlock. Matheson listed his literary influences as Somerset Maugham, Ernie Haemorrhoid, Xavier Hollander and Mohindas Karamachand Gandhi. A gifted cartoonist, he also wrote and produced several television documentaries. He died of a massive heart attack on February 24, 2009.

SAEKO USUKAWA see Who's Who



MILTON NOT LOST

Your Literary Visitors issue brings to mind Milton Acorn.

The year was 1967 and we were partying with a group of Israeli university students in their rented Cornwall Avenue bungalow. Suddenly, in the doorway, stood one of the ugliest men I had ever seen. His rugged weather-beaten face looked like it had been cleft by a harsh force of nature from sheer igneous rock. Ragged discoloured teeth, red nosed, a thatch of thick reddish-gray hair, he stood, all six feet of him, inside the doorframe looking us over, wondering perhaps, if he should join us or not. One look at him was enough. If anybody had Genius written all over him with all the word's eccentric implications, it was Milton Acorn.

He joined us on the floor, drank from a bottle of wine, and we began to talk. I can't remember the gist of the conversation. The place was noisy with dancing, drinking, laughing Thank God It's Friday-nighters. I think the topic was poetry. He might have spoken a few lines. Not many weeks later, Irving Layton came to UBC and gave a talk to about 300 students. The bard from Montreal declared that Milton Acorn was "the finest lyric poet in Canada."

Conversation didn't seem to be Milton's forte. He spoke in expletives, most of them angry denunciations of everything "Booge." (I didn't know until years later that Milton came from a perfectly respectable bourgeois family back on P.E.I.) He said he was a Communist. Spent many hours in the Labour Hall in Vancouver. Thought my paintings would fit into the decor there very suitably. I was painting a lot of figures at the time. I invited Milton to read some of his work at the opening



Milton Acorn

WHAT THE HEKK IS THE TRUTH?

Regarding the discussion as to the truthfulness of the novel *Of a Fire Beyond the Hills* by Ernest Hekkanen, Anne Miles' point [Fiction vs Non-Fiction; Letters, SUMMER] is well taken. That novel does indeed constitute a classifier's conundrum. The "novel based on news stories" is so terribly life-like, it can easily be seen as a memoir. But every memoir is full of lies, isn't it? After all, who remembers their life accurately? For anyone looking for a more in-depth view of the hard-to-classify Hekkanen, I would suggest *The Reluctant Author: The Life and Literature of Ernest Hekkanen; an Informal Study* (of which I happen to be the author).

Margrith Schraner
Nelson

of my first exhibition of paintings in the old Vancouver Arts Club on Seymour Street. He came, looking like one of those Tolkienents, in brown work pants cut off at the knee, his reddish bare legs, gray rumpled work socks and work boots representing some sort of logger-cum-street-person. He read *The Mighty Elephant Has A Five Pound Brain*, standing in the centre of the room, his voice,

strangely gentler, much gentler, yet emphatic, than appearance would expect. Polite applause. Later, a couple of "Booge" men told me the show was fantastic, but the only thing that spoiled it was Milton. He just didn't fit in.

I'd meet Milton in Stanley Park now and then. Once stood him to lunch in the "Booge" dining room overlooking the rose garden. The effuvia of cigarillos fragrant enough to settle the aura of eccentric more solidly about his work-shirted, somewhat narrow shoulders like motes of dust. People looked. Some smiled. Others frowned. Being with Milton was a self-conscious thing. You couldn't help looking around to see who was looking. Sort of like a white woman with a black man in that era of the '40s and '50s when the sight was not as common as it is today.

I didn't know that Milton had a literary reputation in Canada. I hadn't

read his poetry. I'd only heard him recite some of it on the street as we walked up Trafalgar in Kitsilano. Or at Kits Beach, his rugged head on my lap. "You're a Booge," he told me once, looking up into my face with rheumy eyes, "but you're a nice Booge."

Esther Darlington MacDonald
Vancouver

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I am a government librarian, bibliophile and all around book nut working in Washington, D.C. I came across *BC BookWorld* on the internet and now I am thoroughly obsessed. I am printing out your back issues year by year, relishing reading each and every issue. I just printed all of the 2007, having read 2009 and 2008. What a joy to have them available in PDF!! I am learning so much about Canadian authors, books and so much more. Thank you so much.

Leah Smith
Smithsonian Institution's
National Air and Space Museum
Washington, D.C.

CORRECTION: During a performance at the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver in 1979, **Allen Ginsberg** was accompanied by musician **Mike Beddoes**, not **Gary Cramer**. In 1985, Ginsberg performed with guitarist Gary Cramer at Kitsilano High School. Part of that concert was recorded by **Lenore Herb** and can be found on YouTube.