

PETER LAMPMAN CLARKE, AUTHOR

Ghost writer, Toronto, circa 1971 - My first paid writing job came in 1971, on the third floor of an office building in Toronto. I'd be handed a stack of cassette tapes — raw recordings sent up from the States — all captured in noisy restaurants and coffee shops all over the American mid west. The tapes were full of clatter, chatter, jukebox music, and half-lost conversations. My job was to translate those garbled voices into clean, readable features. Each story centred on a local farmer, and, as the ghostly writer, I had to slip in - quietly, almost invisibly - the success they'd had using a particular brand of chemical weed killer. These pieces were destined for the American farm press, though I never saw a single one in print.

I wrote about ten of these loaded, poison pen, human-interest stories and earned ten dollars apiece. I never met a farmer, never met an editor - only the receptionist who took my manuscripts and handed me the cheques. That was my introduction to professional writing: a cassette player, a quiet desk in my Mum's apartment, and the challenge of turning noise into narrative.

Weekly Newspaper Beginnings

The Kawartha Canadian, Lakefield, Ontario 1973 - My real newspaper experience began in 1973, thanks to a hitchhiking ride. I was on my way back to my cabin near Lakefield, Ontario, when a man pulled over and introduced himself as someone new to the area. He was the boyfriend of a woman who had just sold a daily newspaper in Bowmanville and was starting up a local weekly called The Kawartha Canadian. I told him I always wanted to write for a newspaper.

The paper only lasted a few years, but it became my training ground. I wrote human-interest features, took black-and-white photos, went to hockey games - got into fights and press conferences - and helped put the paper to bed every Friday night at its Young's Point home. I learned how to do the weekly news basics, and I learned how to drink on the job. It was small-town journalism at its best - hands-on, unpredictable, and full of stories worth telling. When I couldn't find a good story for the week, I made one up.

The Barnacle Journal, Salt Spring Island, 1998 - My second weekly-paper career took shape on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, where I wrote a lighthearted column called Dock Talk for the Barnacle Journal. The topics wandered everywhere, from boarding American "Santa Ships" to being firmly asked to *un-board* visiting Aircraft Carriers. A few pieces, including Razzle, Chicken of the Sea, and the Carrier story later found a home inside The All Canadian Story Book, Volume 2. After a few years of fun, a serious and

combative new editor arrived at the paper and immediately started fights with the island's loggers, developers, and what felt like everyone living up in the "rich" hills. Things really got serious. She, the editor, once told me, "Your stuff is fluff, but it's *good* fluff... I like it." I have always treasured that faint praise – there is a lot of truth and honesty in it. Only a few months later the Barnacle Journal folded (I know! Sorry! Couldn't resist!) under the pressure of the conflict and was swallowed up by its long-established rival, the award-winning Gulf Islands Driftwood.

The Gulf Islands' Driftwood, Salt Spring Island, 2002 - My time with the Gulf Islands Driftwood was brief but meaningful. This long-established weekly - still going strong today - has earned countless provincial and national awards and remains the literary backbone of Salt Spring and the surrounding Gulf Islands. I was asked to write two features, an honour, and I took on the work, eagerly. One of my stories, *Rescue of a Lifeboat*, went on to win the 2002 Dulcie Wenger Memorial Trophy for Best Canadian Feature in its paid-distribution class. Not long after that, my wife, our dog, and I left the island, and I turned my attention to gathering old pieces, rewriting others, and creating new work for a collection I had long dreamed of putting together.