

WRITE

THE MAGAZINE OF
THE WRITERS'
UNION OF
CANADA

THE FESTIVALS ISSUE

VOLUME 52
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SUMMER 2024

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From the Chair

The joy of small-town festivals

BY DANNY RAMADAN



NOTHING BRINGS ME author joy like going to a writers' festival.

It's like finally being allowed into the cool kids' club back in high school. You roam the hallways of the festival grounds, aware that people know who you are. They line up to say hello to you, holding their dear copies of your latest book or a well-read copy of your debut novel. They're ready with questions, intimately whispering them to you with soft voices. Finally, you reach the green room, where your buddies are hanging out. Glasses of wine clinking, and small plates of yummy cheese and marmalade exchange hands. Then, you sit down with your peers and your idols. You talk shop. You marvel over each other's writing. Finally, you meander to your panel or reading: stand on a stage and perform the art you were born to create.

It is, to say the least, exhilarating.

My favourite, however, will always be small-town festivals. As a West Coast boy, I adore my little towns and their many festivals. Have you ever been to Words on the Water in Campbell River? Have you gotten yourself on a ferry and headed to the Sunshine Coast Festival? What about a quick flight up to Yukon Words in Whitehorse? Gosh, the good people that you meet in places like this truly represent the essence of why we write books. Folks who don't only devour everything they read but digest it with intent and offer a compelling and exciting account of it. The conversations I get to enjoy in small-town festivals are rarely matched elsewhere. There is a commitment to reading in these communities. A brightness to books that had been dimmed in bigger cities. A quietness that cannot be replicated in the loud days of gritty Toronto or bustling Vancouver.

In 2019, I was invited to Words on the Water festival in Campbell River, which only hosts eight authors each year. That dynamic allows for more in-depth conversations with the authors. The proposal was delightful. The authors were matched for one-on-one conversations, then each gave a one-hour solo presentation. Not only did that help the authors connect with the audience, it also allowed us to connect with one another and form quick friendships among ourselves.

Angel, a school teacher in Campbell River, picked me up in her husband's truck from the plane, and drove me to my hotel in the tiny town. She handed me a gift bag with a fancy pen, a notepad, and a gift card to a local restaurant. Then she spent the next 20 minutes talking to me about her daughters. Her husband, Paul, the school's PE teacher, walked me through the festival hall, and introduced me to each one of the attendees, who he knew by name. Soon, the burly man and I became good friends (a weird dynamic for me, speaking of high school, where the popular sporty kids would be my bullies).

Finally, you meander to your panel or reading: stand on a stage and perform the art you were born to create.

Fast forward to a couple of years later, when the family welcomed me and my husband for a delicious dinner in their home on a quick visit we had to Campbell River. We drank wine, while our dogs played together, and talked poetry, writing, and small-town politics.

This is why small-town festivals are my favourite. The friendships I get to enjoy, and the moments of joy I get to celebrate, and the truly authentic family dynamic I get to experience.

Today, as we are about to start yet another festival season, I invite you to say yes to attending small-town festivals. Get on a ferry and sail away to a town you've never visited, get yourself a small room in a bed-and-breakfast, and enjoy a small festival. Believe me, you will be better for it.

From the Editor

BY PHILIP MOSCOVITCH



IN SOME THREE DECADES OF WRITING, I have been invited to a festival exactly once.

Most of my work over the years hasn't exactly been festival fare. But I did have a good long run writing a children's comic, and that got me an invite. I turned up ahead of my reading and saw a bunch of kids already there. I have lots of experience with elementary workshops, and an audience of children is about the best thing going.

The reader ahead of me on the stage was going to be wrapping up soon. Or should have been. The kids waited. His assigned time came and went. He was still reading. My assigned time came and went. He was still reading. No festival staff in sight. The kids were starting to get antsy. Understandable.

By the time I took the stage, after the person ahead of me finally decided to call it a day, they had all left. I wound up reading to my own children. How exciting for them.

Now, maybe because I don't particularly think of myself as a festival-type writer, and maybe because of this bad initial experience, pitching myself as a festival reader/guest/panelist hasn't been on my radar.

But maybe it should be.

Our theme for this issue is festivals: how to get invited to them, what to expect if you're going to one, and why you shouldn't overlook niche, genre, and international festivals. We've also got a fun story about pitching a novel to seven different agents on the same day and what can be learned from the experience. Finally, give our festival-themed crossword a go. It has a lot of clever wordplay.

Reading the articles got me fired up about festivals. Yes! I should be putting my name forward. I should also be going as an attendee. And why didn't I show up at the creative nonfiction conference when it was here in Halifax last year — at the university where I got my MFA in creative nonfiction, no less.

You may have noticed that the last issue of your magazine arrived a little late. We can assure the delays were not at TWUC's end and should be worked out soon. As I write these words in June, I hope this issue will make its way into your hands in a timely manner. Thank you for your patience.



CONTACT THE EDITOR: Get in touch with Editor Philip Moscovitch at write@writersunion.ca.

Letters to the Editor

re: "From the Editor" (Spring 2024)

The decision to no longer carry the "In Memoriam" feature in *Write* magazine goes against the interest of TWUC membership.

As a Union member for over 35 years, and also as one who contributed to this feature (on Antonino Mazza, in 2017), I consider it a step backwards, ignoring those who do not prefer the internet edition of a newsletter.

Notwithstanding the page limitations of the magazine, it won't take much space if the names and the years of birth and death of the departed members could be accommodated in some corner of a page.

Regards,
Wali Alarm Shaheen

re: "How Canada's Public Lending Right Became the Envy of Writers Around the World" (Fall 2023)

This is a short reaction to the featured article on Public Lending Right that appeared in the Fall 2023 issue.

I began publishing in 1973 and continue to do so in 2024. I am the author of over 80 titles, both original and translations of poetry. Besides being an English-language writer, I have published a dozen books in French and Italian. I also founded Guernica Editions and have edited over 1,000 authors and 500 books.

My concerns are as follows.

Though there is mention that librarians believe in freedom of speech and public access, freedom of speech is possible only if there is a listener. One year, in order to free some space in our warehouses, I offered libraries a box of fine books that we had published. Not one library accepted the donation; every person responsible replied that acquisition decisions belonged to head office. If I have \$30 dollars for a book, I will most probably buy bestsellers. The article refers to 40 representative library

systems. This likely means 40 persons who will prefer purchasing bestselling authors. What are the chances, in all honesty, that my 80 or so books and translations find their way into the hands of one of those decision-making representatives? Pretty close to nil.

I used to visit the Frankfurt BuchMesse every year and got to know publishers from around the globe. I was told there are some countries which (I am no longer sure if this is still the case) encouraged libraries to purchase every title published in a year in their territory. This meant a small press could print, say, 1,000 copies of a book and not have to worry about debts accrued in publishing it.

Some publishers in Canada were demanding a system like this back in the 1980s. Needless to say, this sort of “literary socialism” was unacceptable. The bestsellers had to be privileged.

Without a listener, there is no freedom of speech. As Kant wrote in a letter to his friend Mendelssohn, without circulation of ideas, ideas tend to disappear in the minds of individuals.

Cordially,
Antonio D'Alfonso

(Almost) Everything I Know About Writing, I Learned from Romance Novels

BY DONNA JONES ALWARD



THIS SUMMER, my first historical fiction novel, *When the World Fell Silent*, hits bookstore shelves. But this is far from a debut. Since 2006, I've written and published 67 romance novels. You might be surprised to learn that the genre provided me with an excellent training ground for pivoting to a whole new realm of storytelling.

Undeniably, historical fiction is a very different beast from romance. In historical fiction, a romantic relationship does not form the spine of the story and a happy/happy-for-now ending is not required. The scope for historical fiction is much broader, exploring historical events, characters who may or may not be based on real people, and plots that have little to do with romantic love. Yet as I embarked on this new writing adventure, my process was surprisingly bolstered by what I learned from years of writing heartwarming stories of happy ever afters.

Here are just a few of the lessons I learned writing romance that carried over into writing historical fiction:

A Compelling Opening: While you can certainly take your time and work on a slow build in your mainstream story, you still need to grab the reader on page one. Just like in my romances, I wrote the opening to *When the World Fell Silent* several times and employed a prologue to add instant tension and raise questions in the readers' minds. Start with action to put the reader immediately in the scene and have them turning the pages to find out

more — no matter what genre you're writing.

A Great Hook: In romance, the hook is often a trope or tropes, such as friends to lovers, surprise baby, old flames, etc. For example, in *Somebody Like You*, my heroine returns to her hometown only to be confronted by the boy who'd humiliated her in high school when he, now a police officer, responds to a vandalism call at her new business. In historical fiction, often the hook is a historical event (though it doesn't have to be). *When the World Fell Silent* is set during the Halifax Explosion of 1917. My current work-in-progress is partially set on the Titanic. Great hooks inspire great story questions. For example, in *When the World Fell Silent*, the question is, “How will two very different women navigate their lives after tragedy strikes?”

The Holy Trinity of Character — GMC: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict is the cornerstone of character development. In short, it's what your characters want, why they want it, and what is standing in their way. Pick any book off your shelf, and you should be able to discern the protagonists' GMC. As you're writing, drilling down into what really drives your characters is what brings them to life and makes the reader empathize with and relate to them. In fact, I'd argue that of these three, the greatest is motivation. Why do people do what they do, want what they want? It's endlessly fascinating. Additionally, the best

plots are driven by characters' decisions when faced with complications. Which leads me to...

Proactive Characters: Have you ever read a story where things just seem to keep happening to the protagonist and all they do is react? In romance, we learn that the best way to make the reader root for the characters is to make them take charge and move forward — even if they move in the wrong direction. A story where life seems to simply happen to people rather than their decisions moving the story forward is often quite boring. I learned early on that main characters are called leads for a reason. They lead the action.

And finally, **Deep Point of View:** Whether you choose to write in first person or third, present tense or past, going deep into your characters' points of view will bring the story to life. It's the essence of *showing and not telling*, because everything — including your plot — is filtered through the perspective of your characters. View the world through their eyes, and more importantly, through

their hearts. One of my best scenes is from a story where the heroine, a breast cancer survivor, reveals her mastectomy scars to her lover. She's incredibly vulnerable in this moment, and writing this scene through her experience is both raw and painful, and filled with hope.

Whether you're writing about the aftermath of a ship exploding in the harbour or the cold sparkle of stars seen while floating in a lifeboat in the middle of the Atlantic, don't be afraid to open a vein and bleed onto the page. Love, loss, victory, defeat, elation, or despair... the best stories, be it romance, historical fiction, or any other genre, take us on an emotional journey.

We're just along for the ride.

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Donna Jones Alward currently lives in Halifax, N.S. You can often find her near the water, either kayaking on the lake or walking the sandy beaches to refill her creative well. Her new historical fiction, *When the World Fell Silent*, was released July 20, 2024 by HarperCollins Canada.

Getting the Most Out of a Literary Festival

Advice from a former festival director

BY LILY QUAN

IN 2013, I WAS IN A RUT. I was in Toronto, earning a fragile living as a freelance copy editor/proofreader, and I had an unpublished manuscript to my name. Meanwhile, job prospects in communications were bleak. My situation felt like a failure to launch. Over coffee, I complained to a good friend who listened patiently. When I was done, Matt turned to me and said, "Lily, you need an adventure."

The same thought had occurred to me. An acquaintance had recently moved to Whitehorse, and I followed his posts with envy. The Yukon seemed to have everything — opportunity, fresh air, a strong sense of community and a surprising sophistication. Later that spring, I heeded the call of the North and made the leap.

Whitehorse is a town of about 30,000 people. As the provincial capital, there is a large civil service, with employees who are often relocated from across Canada.

Once isolated, the town now features a busy airport with daily flights to Vancouver, only 2.5 hours away. The result is a well-educated, relatively diverse population that likes to travel. Moreover, it is a town that loves books.

During my first few years in the Yukon, I found work opportunities that had never been available to me down south. And yet, I still had my manuscript to deal with. I wanted to move forward with it somehow. Whitehorse had many talented writers but few industry connections. In contrast, I had cultivated a wide network of contacts in Toronto from my time in a publishing program, years earlier. But the Yukon was so far away from the Centre of the Publishing Universe.



The solution to my dilemma was pure Yukoner: Do it yourself.

You're not near them? Bring them to you.

There were always speakers being flown up to present to the community, and the territory had funding available for the arts. Within a few months, I found a sponsoring organization. Then I emailed Cynthia Good, the former president and publisher of Penguin Canada and my old Humber instructor. "Would you like to come to the Yukon?" I asked. It never crossed her mind to say no.

That November, Good arrived in the Far North, along with literary agent Ron Eckel, to present a comprehensive two-day workshop on getting published. It sold out three weeks in advance. The local writers loved getting an insider's view of the industry. Eckel and Good were incredibly impressed by the quality of writing they saw. And of course, they loved visiting the Far North.

Meanwhile I was in charge of all the organizing: securing a venue, running sales and marketing, arranging hosting and accommodation, managing volunteers, and communicating with the presenters. I found it all exhilarating. I loved the adrenaline rush of event planning, and I loved making a tangible contribution to the writing community.

As a writer, it was eye-opening to be on the administrative side.

I kept on going. I established the Northern Lights Writers' Conference and a reading series of the same name. The community favoured nonfiction, so I created the Yukon Nonfiction Festival. One highlight was bringing up the late Teva Harrison, an author who adored the Yukon. After a fantastic presentation in Whitehorse, Harrison went to speak in Dawson City. She spent the night outside in Dawson, watching the Northern Lights dance across the sky. In the morning, she woke up to the news that her graphic memoir, *In-Between Days*, had been nominated for the Governor General's Award.

Each event was rewarding and exhausting for me. There were a thousand and one details to take care of and more than a few fires to put out. After each workshop or talk, I would say, "This is the last one." Within a month, I'd find myself planning another event and throwing myself into the hurricane again.

As a writer, it was eye-opening to be on the administrative side. Being a festival director certainly tempered my expectations and made me aware of the work and care that goes into these events.

Who gets invited?

One important lesson I learned is that there are a lot of factors that go into deciding which authors a festival will invite. For example, Whitehorse is a small town where being open and getting to know the local culture went a long way in the community. As a result, I specifically sought out writers who were personable and genuinely interested in the Yukon.

Stephanie Domet, the co-executive director of the AfterWords Literary Festival in Halifax, agrees. "Writers would be surprised at how hard we work to put together a slate that feels right, and how many kinds of right there are." She says that there are a variety of dynamics behind their choice of authors, such as particular themes or a fresh combination of speakers.

A writer shouldn't take it personally or think it's a reflection on their writing if they weren't invited. "If they don't get chosen, it's not because we didn't want them," Domet insists. "If we could pick every writer that we wanted, we would be programming every day of the year."

Another surprising thing I discovered about festivals was just how few staff are paid. Unless it's a large event like the International Festival of Authors in Toronto, only the executive director gets a salary or an honorarium. Most festivals are staffed by volunteers. I made sure that the volunteers were treated well and that they knew their efforts were appreciated. Our events couldn't have run without them.

If you are invited to a festival, what should you expect?

When the festival sends out the invitation, you should find out the following: your schedule, rate of pay, per diem, hotel/accommodations, and travel expenses. I used The Writers' Union rates for public readings, which is currently \$300 for a full reading and \$150 for a partial reading. The complete information is on the TWUC website. You should also know the format of your session, be it a panel discussion or a one-on-one interview with short readings.

You will be asked to send in a short bio and a headshot photo (i.e., from the shoulders up). Thumbnail photos do not work well in print publications, so make sure you have a hi-res version.

Your bio should be about one paragraph. I have heard writers grouse about having to send in their bios since they are easily available online. Directors often don't know which bio is the latest and you don't want an out-of-date one in the festival promotion. As well, you can treat your bio as marketing copy and highlight what people should know about you as a writer. I have had to edit long bios into compact versions. The irony is that I ended up with generic-sounding copy to promote highly skilled

wordsmiths.

Ideally, you will receive this practical information early on. According to veteran publicist Debby DeGroot however, the landscape has changed for festivals since the start of the pandemic. While some festivals have remained intact, many festivals are in the process of rebuilding. Staffing has become an issue and as a result, the protocols aren't as well-established.

DeGroot advises authors to be proactive and get as much information as possible about your assignment and the festival beforehand. This will allow you to plan your trip and be prepared in case the unexpected occurs, such as not getting picked up at the airport. And keep all your receipts.

How can you prepare for your session?

DeGroot believes festival-goers these days are looking for more than a reading. Be prepared to give a brief introduction to your book, offer a few anecdotes to flesh out the material, and do a short reading. As well, there might be a Q&A at the end. If you are on a panel, find out who the other panelists are, and try to read their books in advance.

Everyone I spoke to said to keep your reading short. Eight minutes was mentioned as a maximum length. If you've been working on a book for four years, that time-frame might be hard to swallow: It's only three pages. "Sometimes people don't realize how long eight to 10 minutes seems like to the audience," says Candie Tanaka, author of the YA novel *Baby Drag Queen*. A popular host of panels and conversations in Vancouver, Tanaka believes that "what the audience is really interested in is knowing more about the author."

This aligns with my experience: The book is not the draw at a reading; the author is. Events are a way to get to know the person behind the book. The reading is there to whet the audience's appetite for the book later on.

When rehearsing your reading, be sure to have a timer on-hand. Darrel McLeod, author of the award-winning memoir *Mamaskatch*, offers this tip: Practise your reading in front of a friend or family member to see if they find the selection compelling. Their opinion might surprise you. In a similar vein, you can also practise your role as a conversation partner on stage by having a friend interview you about your book.

What if you're nervous about being on stage?

You might be a bit anxious about participating in an event for the first time. Interestingly, the first thing DeGroot tells authors is to reread their book. There's been time between the editing and the book's publication, so rereading their work will help refresh their memory.

She also advises authors to always have a copy of their book to hold onto or keep on their lap. "It centres you and reminds you of why you are there," she explains. "Books are such sensory objects," she adds, "they will calm you down straightaway."

The host of the event should also help put you at ease. Tanaka will often ask fun rapid-fire questions like "What's your favourite show on Netflix?" or "What's your favourite K-drama?" in order to break the ice and let the audience get to know the author better.

Eye contact is important. Try to make eye contact with your host or moderator so that you don't miss non-verbal cues. DeGroot says it's also important for the author to make eye contact with the audience. Try to choose one person in the back, one in the middle, and one in the front as your focal points.

What is the main benefit to taking part in a festival?

While there is marketing value in going to a festival, because your book gets promoted in ways it wouldn't have otherwise, the main benefit is being part of a community that celebrates words and writers. Moreover, a festival is a writer's opportunity to connect with other writers. "I love to watch the authors meet each other and find points of intersection..." says Domet. "They get a look on their face [that says] 'I am among friends.'"

Even if you are a newly published author, don't be afraid to approach established ones, McLeod says. "They're usually very, very helpful." At one of his first festival events, he was on a panel with Esi Edugyan, Eden Robinson, and Sarah Selecky. He says they couldn't have been kinder or more accommodating to him.

My favourite event from my festival days remains Books and Bubbly, a reading/wine-tasting where writers were paired with a wine, based on their personality. A local wine connoisseur introduced each drink and author. The writers were a mix of local and "Outside." They sat at a table together and became fast friends. After doing their reading, each writer returned to the table, where they were celebrated with a toast. It was a wonderful evening. An audience member said to me afterwards, "That was so much fun!" And a presenter from Toronto declared, "All readings should be this way."

Good times indeed.

Lily Quan is an award-winning writer of middle grade and young adult novels. She is the author of the middle-grade book adaptation of the Disney/Pixar movie *Turning Red*, entitled *The Real R.P.G.: The Story of the Red Panda Girl*. A fan of all things literary, Lily established and directed the Northern Lights Writers' Conference and the Yukon Nonfiction Festival. She currently makes her home on beautiful Vancouver Island.



Get on the List

Applying to literary festivals

BY KRISTYN DUNNION

I'M A CANADIAN WRITER who has never had a bestseller and has rarely been invited to participate in literary festivals — not since I was young and green and had no idea what I was talking about!

I suspect I represent the silent majority who is secretly stewing, wondering, “How can I get invited to one of these things?”

In hopes of sparing you effort, dear writer, I've spent the past few weeks scrutinizing festival websites, emailing festival directors, and grilling colleagues about their various festival experiences.

The good news: The Canadian festival list on TWUC's website is fairly exhaustive, and a great place to begin.

The bad news: You'll likely have to do your own research. Factor in your availability, how far you're willing to travel, and take into account your literary form and thematic or cultural concerns. It takes time to visit each website for pitch requirements, but it's time well spent.

Do you need a publicist?

Publishing a popular book with the support of a publicist might help secure invitations to literary events, but it's no guarantee. We small-press diehards know smaller publishing houses produce vibrant, courageous work, but turnover in their publicity “departments” (often a sole publicist or student intern) means there's little hope for our festival fantasy of tripping around the country, swilling boxed wine, and signing books. Even the big publishers have limited time and resources. For these and other reasons, some authors hire a publicist out of pocket. Perhaps this is you. If so, put that person to work!

While some festivals, like WordFest Calgary, will only accept author applications coming directly from publicists, the refreshing truth I unearthed is that many Canadian festivals have completely transparent

application processes that *do not* require a publicist or publisher. No gatekeepers!

In other words, there's nothing stopping you or me from applying *this very minute*. Do I hear applause... or do I hear moaning? If the latter, I urge you to reframe the situation. We chose this writing life, so let's be as cheerful and empowered as possible! (Note: I'm still under the influence of Stephen Marche's *On Writing and Failure*.)

One must be prepared to do more than show up, mumble a passage from one's recent oeuvre, and raid the green room refreshment table.

Each festival serves a niche role in its local community. Each engages attendees with a combination of author readings, panel talks, specialty workshops, and more. Networking and skill-building feature as much as author presentations: the audience is equally composed of readers and aspiring writers. In order to present as a strong candidate, one must be prepared to do more than show up, mumble a passage from one's recent oeuvre, and raid the green room refreshment table. Pitch a viable option, possibly more than one thing.

Focus, focus, focus

To begin, set aside time for quiet reflection. Brew the tea. Light the candle. Pray to your gods. Think. Who are you, as a writer? How are you situated, as a person on this planet? Which communities are you immersed

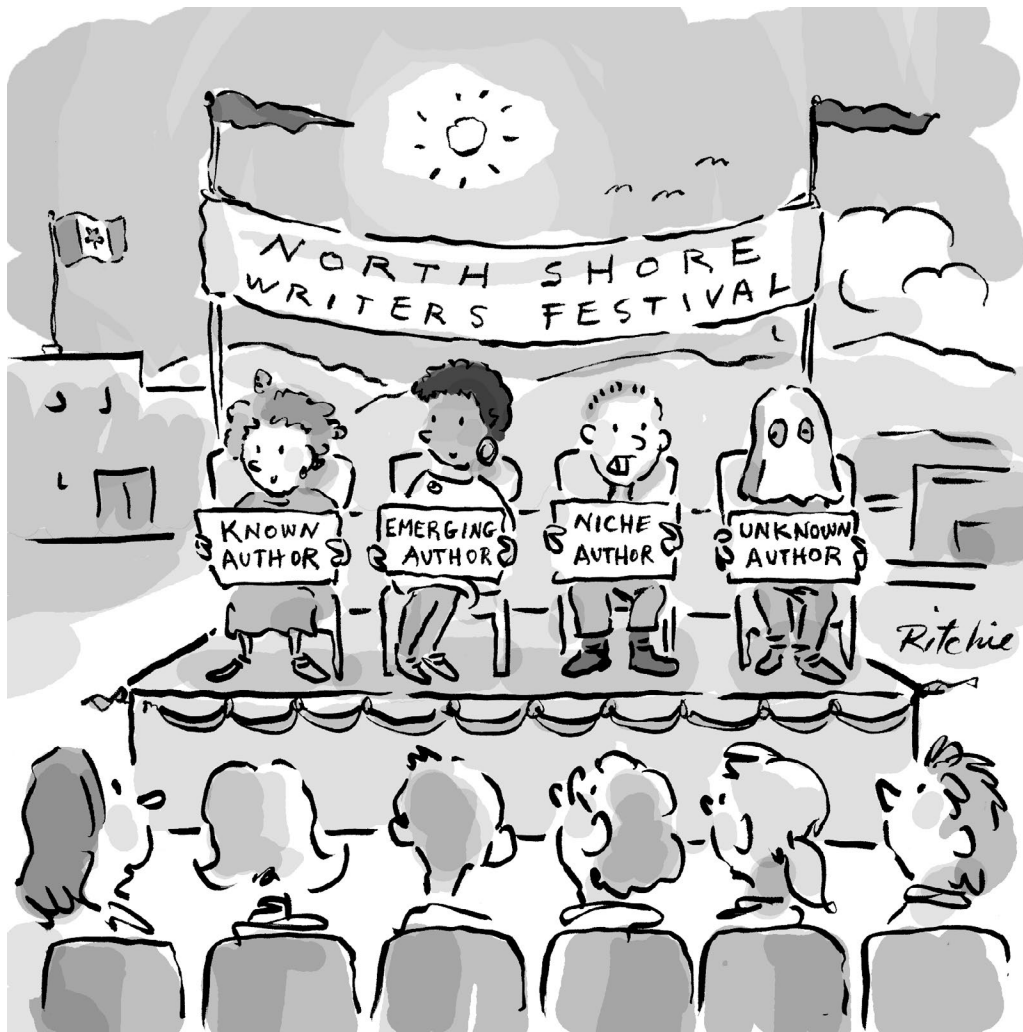
and invested in? What can you offer the wider world of readers, of current and future writers?

And once you've made your pitch, don't take it personally if you don't get an invite. As Karen Stewart, chair of the Alice Munro Festival of the Short Story explains, "Once a list of authors is identified, a committee reviews [it] through the lens of various factors such as a diversity of voices — authors from different backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, and experiences — to provide a rich and inclusive experience."

Stewart adds, "We look to include a mix of known authors to draw crowds and emerging or niche writers to offer fresh perspectives. We look for authors that can engage an audience through different types of programming — author readings, masterclasses, stage presentations, and/or panel discussions, for example. Our budget is limited in the areas of travel and accommodations, so these are other considerations we need to balance each year."

A dynamic author statement, great photo, glowing endorsements of your recent publications, and mention of any awards will go a long way to garnering attention. Pay heed to festival themes, and be sure to add enticements to your application. Could you facilitate an intriguing workshop or host a spirited panel? Do you speak multiple languages? Have you got unusual real-world skills or a unique point of view? Cultural, racial, gender, or other identifiers that inform your writing might add weight to your application. Most of the organizers I spoke with — the ones that weren't too busy running actual literary festivals to reply — said similar things to Karen Stewart about narrowing down applications and making final decisions based on achieving a good representation of diverse participants.

Nonfiction writers will want to investigate Lit Fest Edmonton, which hosts 50+ authors, all remunerated; the festival takes place in October. Poets will find opportunities across the board, but especially at



COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE

Edmonton's poetry festival in April. NorthWords in the Northwest Territories primarily supports Indigenous writers and invites very few authors who aren't local (an estimated 6 for 2025), but they have a transparent process, and you can apply directly. Ontario-based writers get excited about gritLIT in Hamilton, Ontario, which, despite being 20 years old, has the lively vibe of a first (or second!) date. And Brampton's Festival of Literary Diversity (FOLD) is entirely devoted to celebrating underrepresented authors and storytellers. Due to its immense popularity, the FOLD has expanded to include a reading challenge, author visit series, monthly webinars, and a separate festival for children. These are vibrant, necessary, and creative literary hubs!

So, apply if it makes good sense, and, again, don't take it personally if you don't hear back. There are many times more applications than available spots, and festival organizers are juggling many factors, including travel costs. Increase your chances of success and make their

lives easier by applying early — at least six months in advance of each festival.

With or without an invitation, the thing to do is participate, contribute. If you can afford to, buy tickets, passes, or memberships. Otherwise, volunteer. Many festivals host open-mic events — not just for civilians, they're great opportunities for sharing works-in-progress with a live audience. Let's ditch the scarcity mindset (damn capitalism!) that pits author against author. Let's show up for each other. Writing this article has awakened me to a realization: I've been a bit of a curmudgeon. Rather than wondering why I'm *not* invited, I'm brainstorming how to get involved.

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Kristyn Dunnion, author of *Stoop City* (Biblioasis) and *Tarry This Night* (Arsenal Pulp Press), is a self-anointed Can Lit Doula. She helps birth your stuck manuscript to its astounding next draft with compassion and skill. www.kristyndunnion.com.

Genre Festivals

The joy of finding like-minded peers

BY JASON KRAWCZYK

A FESTIVAL OR CONVENTION is a genuine safe space for me. My pupils dilate, my heart rate steadies, and I can complete full sentences without jumbling my words into a slurry of vocal dysfluencies. It's a collection of things I enjoy or am willing to be introduced to in an environment curated and attended by like-minded individuals and specialists. With the addition of programming, the festival becomes a multifaceted event that can somehow entertain, educate, and foster relationships.

Plus, I get to see weird spooky stuff and talk to the people making it.

I'm a writer by trade, and most of my focus has been on screenwriting and manuscripts, but I've done my fair share of ghostwriting, treatments, and punch-ups. I'm also a director when I'm lucky enough to get the opportunity (movies take a heinously long time to produce, and the materials packaged just in development is a whole other article). Being in this field allows plenty of opportunities to attend or be invited to niche festivals.

I've been to a good amount of panels with writers, directors, producers, publishers, and authors. They're usually informative, but more importantly, they humanize the people behind the art you are passionate about. If I'm on the panel, I do my best to be as transparent as possible while also imbuing a sense of hope. It's a rather difficult tightrope, especially when you're holding a microphone, but the actual craft of writing and filmmaking isn't very glamorous behind the scenes.

"Just do it" and other bad advice

At every festival I've ever attended, when questions are opened up to the audience, one brave soul always asks something like, "Hello, I am really inspired by your career trajectory, and I would like to know if there's any advice you'd have for someone with similar aspirations."



Then, without fail, every single time, like death and taxes, the answer is an absolute at every Q&A session. Whether they're seasoned professionals or promising novices, every artist responds with something to the effect of "You just got to do it!" Directors from Quentin Tarantino to a short-film director at a small-town festival will regale you with the following: "You have cameras in your pocket, there's only one person that can make your movie, and only you can make it! Go! Get out of here and start shooting!" Authors promoting the seventh instalment of their sci-fi fantasy epic and indie authors who just released a short-story collection will both preach inspiration such as, "Writing is free, just go! Write! Write! Write! I want to hear what you have to say. Only you can unleash your inner potential and spatter your soul on the blank page! Get out there and write!"

The people bestowing that advice aren't necessarily wrong, but they can't be exactly sure about what has contributed to their success. Talent is real and something tangible you hone, but success is circumstantial. Right place, right time, had a friend of a friend, their craft fit the cultural zeitgeist at the time, hit big on social media, etc. There are a lot of variables that play into exposure, and a lot of them are out of the artists' hands.

If you want less BS, go to a genre festival

This is where genre festivals thrive. Since there's a specific aesthetic, attendees usually have built-in knowledge, and their expectations are less ambiguous. The horror community is as voracious as it is welcoming, so getting an artist to go into explicit detail about their workflow is pretty easy. I've gotten Bruce Campbell's take on method acting *and* the entirety of Stephen Lang's workout routine in one night. Fun interactions, for sure, but what if you're looking for something a little more tangible in terms of advice?

Well, you're in luck because you are surrounded by like-minded individuals who are just as eager to breathe life into their work. Those people are the most inspiring people you can come across. Writing is synonymous with loneliness. The image of untamed hair and sunken eyes

I've gotten Bruce Campbell's take on method acting *and* the entirety of Stephen Lang's workout routine in one night.

looming over a typewriter is a mainstay for the craft. And it is true to a degree, but I've met several writers that I swap works-in-progress with at these conventions.

That's the real, priceless reason for attending genre festivals and conventions: peers.

A professional editor, agent, or publisher will not read your work in progress, let alone give you feedback. Do you know who will? Artists in similar spaces. Self-editing is taxing and humiliating, but it requires just as much focus as creating prose. Having outside perspectives, especially from individuals in similar straits, will sharpen your abilities and help guide you on a path forward.

There's nothing of mine produced today that hasn't gone through the peers' gauntlet. And they're peers I've met at conventions and festivals. Every single one of them. I just attended a writer's workshop organized by the writers I met at FanExpo; I am doing a reading next weekend because of the people I've met at Nightmare in the Falls; and my next movie, *Sunset Superman*, has been honed to where it is because of the feedback I've received from friends I've met at DEDfest, Beyond Fest, and SXSW's Midnight Madness. From shorts to features, from a short story to novels. They've been there for me at every stage of my career, and I hope I've been there for them.

Festivals and conventions are wonderful. They're a space where creators and fans alike can relish in their passions. Genre festivals are particularly enlightening because you can see how wide the spectrum of storytelling can get. But they can provide something beyond merchandise and autographs. They can foster relationships, whether it be brief encounters or lasting partnerships.

So, much like hell, conventions are not just the events that take place. They're other people. And, as with any creative endeavour, it is not a road to be travelled alone.

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Jason Krawczyk is a writer and film director. His first book, *An Earth That Knows Magic* (Black Hare Press), was published in 2022. He's followed up with *It Looks Like Dad* (Little Ghosts Books, 2023) and the forthcoming *Reality Squall* (Nosetouch Press, 2024). In 2015, Jason wrote and directed the Henry Rollins horror-comedy *He Never Died*, which premiered at SXSW and is streaming on Netflix. The sequel, *She Never Died*, was released in 2020 on Tubi, and *Sunset Superman*, starring Michael Jai White, premieres in 2024. Jason and his husband, Chris Krawczyk, own Little Ghost Books, an inclusive café and bookstore with horror books from sterling classics, LGBTQ authors, and burgeoning indie publishers.



International Festivals are Calling Canadians

Local tales and dispatches from the festival scene abroad

BY LEXIE ANGELO

IT'S A GENUINE THRILL to be part of an international literary festival. There's a real buzz in the air. The brochure is full of different authors' names. The green room is packed. Sometimes the audience rushes to sit in the front row, other times, they avoid it like the plague. The variety of panels is overwhelming. In the bookstore, covers look nothing like the ones back home. A pre-festival pub night includes free drinks, and the person I was just talking to turns out to be quite famous. It's an experience unlike any other.

I've been fortunate over the years to participate in several literary festivals abroad, both as an attendee and a speaker. From the massive spectacle that is the Edinburgh International Book Festival to some of the smaller affairs and genre-specific events, like Bloody Scotland or Aye Write, the international festival scene has so much to offer, and Canadians only stand to benefit.

Sense of community and networking

Poet and writer Micheal Pedersen, whose novel *Boy Friends* (Faber & Faber, 2022) was a Sunday Times Critics Choice, says the connections he's made at festivals have "resulted in media opportunities, audience building, and book sales." He advocates for festivals as places of opportunity, where he's picked up books from authors he wouldn't have discovered by any other means and has

personally walked away with deals for "translation rights, subsequent readings, and return trips, and blurbs for future books from writers I've read with."

I've also used festivals to my networking advantage. Last year, I capitalized on an opportunity to pitch my latest crime novel at Bloody Scotland where I met Jenny Brown, a literary agent based in Edinburgh. She and I had met earlier during the festival's kick-off torchlight procession and struck up a conversation as we trod down to the main venue in torrential rain. We reconnected later at a creative writing conference hosted by the University of Edinburgh, where she offered some invaluable advice on publishing. The majority of my work is published in the UK and Europe, and I've had more success abroad than I have from Canadian publishers.

Jonathan Whitelaw, a Scottish-born journalist and writer known for his cozy crime debut, *The Bingo Hall Detectives* (HarperCollins, 2022), describes literary festivals as places that foster "a sense of community." Now resident in Canada, he's made many friends at U.K. festivals over the years, and in an interview recalled heading to the Shetland Islands for a local festival and bumping into historical thriller author David Bishop of the Cesare Aldo series (Macmillan, 2021) saying, "I'd flown the five thousand miles from Calgary only to be sat a row behind him on the flight to the island."

A vibe for every type of writer

What makes attending festivals outside of Canada so appealing is how accessible they are for international audiences and how varied their formats can be, particularly in the United Kingdom. Each one is unique in a sense, as Whitelaw says, some “are very relaxed,” while “others are quite regimented and disciplined.” I personally gravitate to the more casual affairs where there are fewer boundaries and roped-off areas between readers and writers. A central gathering spot, like a pub, hotel bar, or library, helps corral folks and create a more lively atmosphere where accidental meetings can occur.

Pedersen notes that many festivals have parallel events specifically for authors — a behind-the-scenes experience for those in the green room. He points to the Ubud Writers & Readers Festival in Indonesia, the HeadRead Festival in Estonia, and New Zealand’s Verb Wellington and Word Christchurch as festivals that “went the extra mile with author experiences” such as arranging cultural trips “to galleries and music centres and vineyards” as well as writing retreats. These extras can really make the international trek worthwhile and can round out grant funding applications in terms of the benefit to a writer’s career.

Book-lovers in the audience

One of the most notable differences between Canadian and international festivals is the audience themselves. I met a woman who treated a local book festival as personal retreat, akin to a spa getaway, where she was able to meet her favourite authors and pick up new and exciting titles. I’d never thought of festivals in that way.

Jonathan Whitelaw has noticed this as well.

“A big difference for me is the audience,” Whitelaw says. When he is presenting on panels or doing readings in the U.K., “audiences tend to be there for the book you’re talking about, that kind of thing... whereas here in Canada, I’ve found that audiences at events and festivals are more keen on the process of writing.” Whitelaw describes a funny realization at his first event in Calgary: “I realized about halfway through that 90 percent of the audience were taking notes. I had a sudden panic thinking, ‘Oh my God, what have I said?’”

But the insatiable demand for creative-writing advice is a unique feature of the Canadian festival circuit. As Whitelaw notes, “Audiences here are very intrigued and curious about becoming writers themselves and see book events and festivals as a chance to interact with authors in that way.”

Get the most out of the experience

To capitalize on your chosen festival experience, Whitelaw suggests taking in “as many panels and talks as you can” because it’s arguably “the most special” part of being a writer. However, Pedersen recommends finding a balance between “full-throttle committing to everything offered to you” and making sure you have enough energy and momentum left.

I can confirm that this is good advice, as I have booked onto far more events than my energy could sustain. Tickets have gone unused. Feet have been blistered. And naps have been had. I once booked accommodation only to realize the venue was a near vertical walk uphill. My calves never forgave me.

Pacing yourself, but also attending year after year, can really help build up relationships and connections. It’s something I think every Canadian writer and book lover ought to experience.

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Lexie Angelo is currently pursuing a PhD in creative writing from the University of Edinburgh. Her work has appeared in *Gutter Magazine*, *Culinaire Magazine*, *Neon Books*, and *The Selkie Publications*. She previously launched the chapbook *A Rough Season* (Loft on Eighth Press, 2020) and the short story collection *Thieves* (Radical Bookshop and Press, 2023). She was shortlisted for the New Writer’s Award with the Scottish Book Trust in 2024 and teaches writing at the University of Calgary. Follow her @angelolexie or lexieangelo.com.





What I Learned from Pitching Half a Dozen Agents at a Festival in One Day

BY JACKIE LARSON CARMICHAEL

SO THERE I WAS, manuscript in hand, meeting with one agent after another.

Multiple agents in one day!

My big break was here.

Okay, so the manuscript wasn't complete. And true, I was paying the agents three dollars a minute Canadian to listen to me, shelling out over \$200 for the "pitch the agent" experience.

But still.

The concept

I had tossed my fractured first novel into a deep dark file. There's a reason most first novels don't get published.

I'd tried peddling my second novel manuscript, but I knew in my own editorial heart it wasn't ready — and the polite sniffs of mild interest I'd gotten from a couple of Canadian editors suggested that I was, in fact, right about that — even after workshopping the partial manuscript at the Simon Fraser University Writer's Studio.

As a dual citizen, I had a foot in both the American and Canadian markets. I'd had some success in newspaper and magazine markets, mostly in the States, and I'd been a news editor — so my work was at least fairly clean.

My first nonfiction book — a how-to collaboration with two other writers — had been published. But fiction? That was new territory for me. Well, kind of new: I'd been working on this novel since my youngest son was two, and now he has a PhD.

Instead of taking the standard approach of focussing on one or two agents with specific interest, I decided to be empirical about it.

I figured the best way to learn about pitching a manuscript to an agent was to sign up for as many pitch sessions as I could, changing up my strategy with each prospective agent based on the reactions I got.

It started with a speech

I'd been studying the "elevator pitch."

The intriguing premise that has the ring of a million-seller. The magic-carpet intro to that first, momentous gatekeeper — that literary unicorn, the agent.

Writing the book may be agony and getting it traditionally published nearly the impossible dream Sinatra sang about. The unreachable star. But getting an agent? I thought I'd be better off buying a lottery ticket.

Instead, I signed up in advance to pitch a handful of agents from the list of those visiting a one-day writers' workshop in Arlington, Virginia. I bought myself the allotted 10 minutes with each of them. I honestly don't remember how many there were — I think initially I signed up for six, but one didn't show, and two more spots opened up during the day because of cancellations.

My strategy was to put myself in the driver's seat at the meetings. In my head, I was taking the attitude that I would give each of them a chance to prove themselves to me. I wanted to learn what I could about what made an agent's ears perk up — or their eyes glaze over.

Pitch #1

And so, armed with my bravado, I went to my first pitch session.

She seemed to want me to go first. She seemed to be half my age.

Crickets.

The clock was ticking loudly. I could hear my own heartbeat.

My elevator pitch! I figured I'd start with the amount of description I could get across in the course of an elevator ride, and gauge her interest from there. If she showed any flickers of interest or asked questions, I'd shell out more detail.

Make it up on the spot, if I had to.

And I had to.

I could do this.

Oh, and definitely remember to leave out the part about the book being set in Canada. How hard could it be to change it from Vancouver Island to the Oregon coast?

I didn't expect to be so nervous. I'd been published. I'd workshopped part of the book. I was somewhat outgoing: My son always said I could make friends... with a rock.

For the first agent, I interlaced my introduction with unnecessary nervous placeholders and repetitions: "You know? Like, obviously."

"Basically."

"Keely is, like, a disgraced newspaper editor..." Was that pity I observed in the agent's eyes? Boredom? Was she thinking about what colour to paint the ceiling? Or reminding herself she's getting paid three dollars a minute to listen to this dreck? "... who kind of flees big-city humiliation, basically returning home to a tiny coastal hamlet..." I'm wondering if my mouth looks funny when I talk, and if the agent's eyes would light up if I threw in a murder. "... to care for her ailing mother, Moira, who is, like, a famed children's author and illustrator, who is, ummm, in the grips of early-onset Alzheimers — at her quirky seaside home."

With each subsequent retelling, I got a little smoother, more confident.

The agents seemed to all have their own sub-specialties — YA, or suspense, or literary fiction, the list went on. As an exercise in quick thinking, I mixed up a new plot cocktail for each agent in the time between appointments, serving it up with a fresh plot twist or two to suit their known literary palate or emphasizing some other element of the story.

How about the first love she reconnected to? Or the sub-plot about the mob connection that had stalked her home? I tried making my protagonist younger. Older. More glamorous. More humorous.

When I found out I had inadvertently signed up with an agent who specialized in speculative fiction and children's books, I decided to rise to that challenge — and to pitch another author, my stepdaughter who writes children's science books and whose brief foray into self-publishing had showed, at the time, that she needed and deserved an agent of her own.

Overall, the trick became remembering the quick patch-ups for myself so I could change up the manuscript later. I do wish I'd documented it all better, maybe recording it on my cell phone.

By the end of the day, I had at least four requests for 10 pages, and one for a full manuscript.

I never did finish the novel to my satisfaction, but one of these days, I intend to revisit those business cards I picked up.

So, the first thing I learned was this: write out your pitch.

Other lessons from the day:

- Make your pitch to someone who wants to hear it. What do they specialize in?
- Have a dynamite first line — think, "Call me Ishmael."
- Have a short paragraph with the book in a nutshell.
- Know thyself. Be able to define your book's genre, and how many words you have.
- Look for an agent who says they're looking for your chosen genre.
- Even if you're paying for their time, expect to go first.
- Practise on your friends.
- Dive in with measured confidence and enthusiasm.
- If the meeting feels good, ask for their card, and hang onto it! I took the precaution of photographing it.
- If they ask for pages, follow through and send them.

Go get 'em!

Jackie Larson Carmichael is the author of two nonfiction books about World War I. *Tweets from the Trenches* was short-listed for a Whistler Independent Book Award. She is a book coach, and she lives in Edmonton with her family and their Shetland sheepdogs and writes for the *Edmonton Journal*. Jackie is the TWUC National Council representative for Alberta, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. Her revised, revised novel is almost ready... to pitch to more agents.

Writing Rights

Who gave robots permission to take our work... and our memories?

BY JOHN DEGEN



AT THE TWUC PRE-AGM TOWN HALL in mid-May, Union members and National Council had a spirited discussion about artificial intelligence — both its use as a creative tool and possible partner and the widening scandal of unauthorized use of professional creative work in the ongoing training and perfection of AI engines.

Creator organizations around the world have registered a near-unanimous objection to the tech sector's helping itself to the work of creative professionals without notification, permission, or even a nod toward compensation.

I write this column one day on from the Union's latest meeting with federal lawmakers to discuss generative AI. The Parliamentary Caucus on Emerging Technology (PCET), a cross-party group of lawmakers concerned with encouraging technological advancement and also with properly regulating its activity in our society and our markets, invited Canada's writing and publishing organizations to express our thoughts on the current landscape around AI.

As at the town hall, the conversation was not one-dimensional and the answers not readily clear. But quite apparent was the fact that everyone is currently seized by the issue, and we all seem to intuit it will have a dramatic impact on society going forward. No one denies the promise of AI tools for problem-solving in medicine, or climate science, or feeding the world. The question is, are we required to hand over everything we do in the creative sector in order to get to those world-changing outcomes? Do we have to hand them over for free, without a say in their use?

At a meeting of the International Authors Forum in June (TWUC has chaired the IAF since 2014), we heard from visual artists about the Meta corporation's new terms of service for Facebook and Instagram. These new terms are aimed at freeing up... well... everything people post on Meta's social platforms for use by that corporation in the creation and perfection of its AI products. As of June 26, 2024, users of Facebook and Instagram will have to explicitly opt-out of allowing those platforms to use images, text, and likely even metadata (like location and date) in posts for the training of Meta's AI. TWUC members received a warning about this from head office before that deadline.

Visual artists are on the frontlines of this issue. Instagram is a centrally important bit of social media for artists and photographers wishing to spread word of mouth about their work, and to direct interested consumers to sales platforms. Established secondary rights markets for visual arts are centrally important to the creative economy and artists' ability to continue working professionally. Meta's new TOS crash right through that economy in the classic *move fast and break things* manner of Big Tech.

But everyone uses Facebook and Insta, don't they? Or is that just my generation? (*I think we know the answer to this.* — ed.) It's where I post photos of all my finds on birdwatching trips. My kids at various ages have made appearances on my feed, as have my increasingly frail parents. I explicitly do NOT give permission to Mark Zuckerberg to use my old folks, my sons, and the local wildlife as consumables for his robots. But stating this in a *Write* magazine column is not good enough. I must now go through Meta's complex and needlessly difficult opt-out procedures.

And, as I explained to the PCET lawmakers, cultural works haven't been given reason to believe in Big Tech's good-faith adherence to opt-outs. The ongoing fight with the Internet Archive provides insight into just how much tech evangelists respect the wishes and opinions of artists. Spoiler... they don't.

The Union continues to follow this issue closely and consult with appropriate industry colleagues and our lawmakers.

Industry News

BY JOHN DEGEN

BOOKSELLERS

Indigo Goes Private

By print time, it is expected that the buyout offer from Trilogy Investments and Trilogy Retail Holdings for the Indigo Books & Music chain will be approved, and the big-box bookstore's stock will have been delisted from the Toronto Stock Exchange. Indigo has struggled to succeed as a public company, seeing falling stock values over time, and a vicious cyber-attack that affected revenues during the pandemic. Trilogy Investments, owned by Gerald Schwartz, is expected to return complete control of the company to founder Heather Reisman, who recently returned as CEO. Reisman and Schwartz are married and are prominent philanthropists in Toronto.

BOOK STATS

Statistics Canada Showing Successful Post-Covid Market Rebound for Books

Recent figures from Statistics Canada show the commercial writing and publishing industry in Canada has recovered and has now surpassed pre-pandemic sales and growth numbers. Total book sales for 2022 (the last year for which StatsCan has complete reports) beat the previous high, from 2018, to reach \$998.3 million. What's more, 52.8 percent of the books sold in Canada in 2022 were written by Canadian authors, the second year in a row domestic authors captured the majority of the market. While excellent news on the commercial front, the Canadian book sector has yet to recover from the failure of its educational market.

Majority of Canadian Readers Accessing Books for Free

According to a recent Booknet Canada study on leisure time activities for Canadians, the book industry in this country has a new challenge. For the first time ever in their studies, Booknet found that "readers across all formats were acquiring books from free sources more than from paid sources." While public library access continues to be one of the most-used free sources for print, audio, and ebooks, the trend toward free access undoubtedly also includes illegal sources that cut author royalty completely out of the picture. Combined with other BookNet findings showing falling dollar totals for Canada's greatest buyers of books, this adds yet another economic stressor to a sector that has struggled against unauthorized access for decades.

PIRACY

Multinational Education Firms Sue Google Over Pirate Advertisements

Four of the most powerful educational publishers in the world have filed a U.S. lawsuit claiming damages from thousands of advertisements displayed by search giant Google that the publishers claim point to pirated versions of their products. Elsevier, Cengage Learning, Macmillan Learning, and McGraw Hill have partnered on the legal action and assert their good-faith attempts to have Google remove the ads have been ignored. Supporters of the lawsuit have stressed the vulnerability of students in a pirate marketplace, noting the risk of credit card fraud and failure to deliver purchased pirated materials. The U.S. educational-materials market is estimated at \$8.3 billion, while Google earns upwards of \$300 billion annually from advertising.

PUBLISHERS

University of Toronto Press Seeking Larger Market for Commercial Nonfiction

With the expansion of its Aevo trade nonfiction imprint from five books to 15 per year, University of Toronto Press (UTP) appears to be taking aim at commercial nonfiction as a support for its core academic business. UTP has gathered a twelve-member volunteer advisory board to consider proposals and push the commercial work forward. Of course, The Writers' Union will carefully monitor contract practices in the commercial market during this expansion. Academic contracts and commercial contracts traditionally differ on extended copyright control.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI Firms Lobbying to Use Published Work for Free

In the six months ending June 2024, Toronto-based company Cohere, a developer of large language models that underlie artificial intelligence, met at least a dozen times with highly placed officials in Ottawa. Cohere is among the AI-sector firms calling on Canada to amend the Copyright Act with a new exception for free and unauthorized use of text and data in the further development of AI. Google Canada has had 23 such meetings in the same time period, though perhaps not all centered on artificial intelligence. While Canada's cultural sector organizations have delivered a consistent recommendation that Canada allow a valuable rights market for AI-development to develop and grow, it's clear we are up against a very active and well-funded tech lobby determined to further weaken workers' rights in Canada.

Take It Outside

Authors in the park

BY ELEANOR P. SAM

THE CONVENTIONAL PLACES for a book launch or author reading include libraries, book stores, or book clubs. But Shakespeare's plays are hosted in Toronto's High Park, so why not offer authors a similar platform?

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is, after all, not only home to many creative writers and storytellers but to some of the finest parks in the province. Hence, the Authors in the Park initiative was born. When I shared the idea with other writers, the response was tepid at best, but I saw its potential. Connecting with book clubs via Instagram and posters in neighbourhood storefront windows increased interest.

So, enveloped by nature, on Saturday, June 1, six Ontario-based authors read from their work in Home Smith Park, which is historically significant as a traditional Indigenous trade route. Attendees gathered by banks of the Humber River, as did groups of mallards, led by green-headed, yellow-billed males. The air was replete with melodic birdsong as yellow-brown Baltimore orioles and northern red cardinals observed the activities from nearby maple trees.

At the outset, the intent was to have six authors walking along designated paths, reading, pausing, and addressing audience questions. Writers were unsure, however, of their ability to attract followers and decided that a collective gathering and reading was a safer bet. Accordingly, the approach morphed, and all readings were held in one location with questions taken after each one. We had a range of writers working in genres including women's and contemporary fiction, suspense, memoir, and poetry. For the most part, the authors did not know each other, yet the flow of their narratives was complementary. Attendees sat along park benches or in folding chairs, immersed in the readings and enjoying humour, excitement, wonder, pain, mystery, and reflection.

P.H. Oliver read from her debut novel, *The Gynesaur*, a humorous tale about four women from different walks of life and their bond of friendship that defied extinction.

Next, I introduced listeners to my novel *Manor on the Viridian Sea*, about a Canadian millennial's fantasy of life on a Caribbean island that turns into a series of trap doors.

Jass Aujla's piece from her riveting page-turner about identical twin sisters, *Anjali and Riah in Next of Twin*, kept the audience on the edge of their seats.



Kris Purdy's excerpt from her novel, *Paradise Pending*, gave a glance into partners Dani and Jo's mind-bending medical drama that unfolded on a vacation in Spain.

Laura Pratt shared a cringe worthy passage of a blow-out scene that became a public spectacle from her memoir *Heartbroken*.

Lastly, Maureen Hynes took the audience on a series of journeys through her poetry collection *Take the Compass*.

The event's verdant surroundings came with challenges. The rush of the Humber cascading in the background competed with the readings, making it difficult to grasp the nuances in some pieces. Park rules prohibited the use of microphones, although one author persisted and brought a portable public address system, like those used by tour guides. This proved helpful and should be considered when readings in open spaces are undertaken.

The event culminated with authors selling and signing their books. A giveaway table filled with gently used works by other writers was provided. Excess copies of these books were donated to local initiatives, such as little free libraries. Participating authors left the park as colleagues and agreed to create a virtual writer's group and ongoing events.

The stories told, whether in narrative or poetic forms, were many and as diverse as the authors themselves. There was not a "danger of telling a single story," as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns.

Parks with their fresh air, natural beauty, and walking paths are healthy calming places. Our city has a treasure trove of them. It is our hope that other authors will embrace this approach and read from their stories in unconventional spaces like parks while partaking of nature's abundant offerings.

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Eleanor P. Sam is a Toronto-based novelist, born on a sugar plantation in Guyana, South America, with West and Central African ancestry. Her two novels are *The Wisdom of Rain* (2nd edition, Isalea Publishing, 2022) and *Manor on the Viridian Sea* (Isalea Publishing, 2023). Keenly interested in her cultural and historical heritage, her stories reflect and express this legacy. Eleanor received her bachelor's degree from York University and her master's degree from University of Toronto.

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Writing tools? Books? Dinner with a friend?

Writers on their PLR payments

BY STEVEN ROSS SMITH

HOW WOULD WE WRITERS SURVIVE the depths of winter without the heart warming Valentine's bestowal of Public Lending Right payments? Okay, they've withered a bit since the program launched in 1986, what with more writers in the pool and static funding, but anticipation still makes me hum — maybe the Motown hit “Money (That's What I Want),” originally recorded by Barrett Strong, and covered by the Beatles in 1963.

Do we celebrate the windfall by splurging or let it help us recover stability? I literally enhanced my stability once, using my payment to buy an ergonomic office chair. PLR founders, my back thanks you.

Speaking of the founders, BC writer Andreas Schroeder, so instrumental as to be now legendary, recently shared a story with me about his PLR benefit. While he drove the PLR concept forward, he also “drove an ancient Saab clunker, inherited from a friend, so [it] cost nothing to acquire but turned out to be extremely expensive to keep on the road. It went through oil filters like the daily shits, and they were expensive and hard to find. I used my very first PLR cheque to splurge on a whole boxful of these filters (for which God promptly punished me when the Saab gave up its final ghost only a few months later, and nobody was interested in buying the remaining filters back).”

This seems to be unjust karma. But as Andreas suggests, shit happens. Recently, my February financial injection arrived concurrent with the need for an oral extraction — no, not a sound poem, but a toothy crack and decay and costly cosmetic fix. Necessary work, which likely financed my (excellent) dentist's vacation. Had he known, he might have thanked PLR for the shade under his palapa.

But all is not drill or chill. I have used the funds to bring a credit card balance — as Amy Winehouse sings — “back to black.” (Yes, Amy's context was different.)

Writer, illustrator, and micro-press founder Onjana Yawnghe works as a nurse in Vancouver and exercises PLR practicality too, “using the money towards purchasing the writing tools I needed, like a new laptop.”

Indeed, investment in our tools is important. Books, for instance: with my PLR, in the mid-nineties, I bought Jerome Rothenberg's enlightening anthologies *Poems for the Millennium*, Volumes One & Two at about \$42 American dollars a pop, which seemed like a lot then. I've returned to them often, and they have provided inestimable value.



Winnipeg poet, teacher, and translator Sally Ito speaks of PLR “as ‘daily bread’ payments that I could look forward to in February.” And she pays it forward: “I no longer buy new books but rather order them from the public library so that the writer will have their book purchased and put into the library system.” In another generous gesture she said she “recently filled out the PLR forms for an elderly Japanese Canadian woman writer in her nineties [Grace Eiko Thomson] who came out with her memoir.” Sally's own PLR “just went into the pot of my usual writing income, which is frightfully little.” One of her friends refers to the payments as “jam money.” So, Sally adds, “I might have bought some jam.”

Asked about a frivolous use, Onjana recalls “spending the whole amount on a fancy and delicious dinner with a friend!” Writers do deserve pleasures. Hardly frivolous as we're rarely treated to company-sponsored dinners.

I've used the funds to finance expenses for writing retreats in a monastery, a farm, and a vineyard, turning those bucks into words. My one-week Tinhorn Creek Winery residency in the Okanagan was a perk where in off-hours I enjoyed the tasting room. But hey, I did write daily to earn the evening sips.

And I like jam, too — but the musical kind — so perhaps my most indulgent use of the money, about seven years ago, was to fly to the Winnipeg Folk Festival where I saw live favourites like Daniel Lanois and John K. Samson and discovered Brandi Carlile. I rocked through the day and into the night, and I assume I slipped a bit of PLR change into the musicians' pockets. A fair trade, as music regularly slips into my narratives and verses.

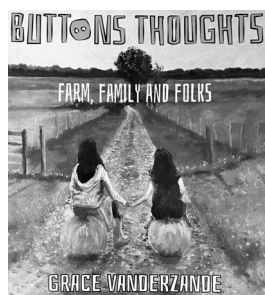
And there are the intangible rewards. As Onjana Yawnghe puts it: “Not only is the money useful, but it is an acknowledgment of our writing and efforts. A sort of proof of our literary existence. I'm thrilled every time the cheque comes in the mail.”

.....
Steven Ross Smith, Banff Poet Laureate, 2018-21, loves music and has published the seven-book *Fluttertongue* poetic series. *Fluttertongue 3: disarray* won the Saskatchewan Book of the Year Award in 2005. His fourteenth book is *Glimmer: Short Fictions* (Radiant Press, 2022.) More recent is *The Green Rose*, a chapbook collaboration with Phil Hall (above/ground press). Smith lives and writes in Victoria, BC.

New Members



Scott Clancy, *Developing Coaching Leaders*, WWLJ Publishing, 2023.



Grace Vanderzande, *Buttons Thoughts: Farm, Family and Folks*, Crossfield Publishing, 2024.

Hari Alluri, *Tabako on the Windowsill*, Brick Books, 2025 (forthcoming).

J.E. Barnard, *When the Flood Falls*, Dundurn Press, 2018.

Allan Bartley, *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada*, Formac, 2020.

Raymond Beauchemin, *The Emptiest Quarter*, Signature Editions, 2023.

Doris Belusic, *I Am Blind*, Beech Street Books, 2024.

Richard Bourgeois-Doyle, *George J. Klein: The Great Inventor*, Canadian Science Publishing, 2004.

David Boyd, *The Reflecting Man - Volume Five*, Wonderdog Press, 2024.

DA Brown, *Spit and Polish*, Somewhat Grumpy Press Inc., 2024.

Julie Bruck, *How to Avoid Huge Ships*, Brick Books, 2018.

Melinda Burns, *Homecoming*, Bookland Press, 2025 (forthcoming).

Tina Capalbo, *Ari and the Very Loud Bird!*, FriesenPress, 2024.

Jody Chan, *impact statement*, Brick Books, 2024.

Monique Chénier, *Remembering Medusa*, *Remembering*, Your Scrivener Press, 2010.

Sasha Colby, *The Matryoshka*, ECW Press, 2024.

Lisa Coleman-Brown, "Jingle Bells Java Jive," *Merry Capreol*, MadCap Publishing, 2022.

Sarah Jane Conklin, *What's in Flora's Shoebox?*, Monster House Publishing, 2022.

Marcus Cutler, *I Do Not Eat Children*, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2024.

John Delacourt, *The Black State*, Now or Never Publishing, 2024.

A.J. Devlin, *Cobra Clutch*, NeWest Press, 2018.

Pat Dobie, *The Tenants*, Anvil Press, 2024.

Jillian Dobson, *Girl Takes Drastic Step!*, *How Molly Lamb Bobak Became Canada's First Official Woman War Artist*, Nimbus Publishing, 2024.

Michael Donovan, *A Shamrock in the Snow*, Breakwater Books, 1996.

Oliver Dymant, *The Ninth Forsvar*, Siog Press, 2024.

Mary Fairhurst Breen, *Any Kind of Luck at All*, Second Story Press, 2021.

Christy Jordan-Fenton, *Fatty Legs*, Annick Press, 2010.

Ian Fisher, "Athos in August," *Southword Literary Journal*, 2023.

Alice Fitzpatrick, *Secrets in the Water*, Stonehouse Publishing, 2024.

Andy Flanagan, *The Endless Battle*, Goose Lane Editions, 2017.

Marcy Fogal, *A Mercy of Widows*, Happy Toad Books, 2023.

Donna E. Frederick, *Managing eBook Metadata in Academic Libraries: Taming the Tiger*, Elsevier, 2015.

Judith Friedland, *Restoring the Spirit*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.

Laurie Anne Fuhr, *Night Flying*, Frontenac House, 2018.

Jeremy Thomas Gilmer, *A Darker Sun*, Véhicule Press, 2025 (forthcoming).

Susan Goldenberg, *Deadly Triangle*, Dundurn Press, 2022.

Angelic Goldsky, *Tinder Loving Empire*, self-published, 2019.

Rhoda Rabinowitz Green, *Aspects of Nature*, Inanna Publications, 2016.

Michèle Dawson Haber, "Two Dads and a Lump of Clay," *The Manifest Station*, 2024.

Ferial Haque, *My Chosen Words: Memories of A Professional Immigrant Woman*, self-published, 2019.

Trevor W. Harrison, *Prairie Bohemian: Frank Gay's Life in Music*, University of Alberta Press, 2015.

Shakkoi Hibbert, *The Poetic Transitions from a Hot Head to a Conscious Queen*, self-published, 2018.

Kim S. Kierans, *Journalism For the Public Good*, University of Calgary Press, 2024 (forthcoming).

Heidi Klaassen, "Good Feeling," *The Saranac Review*, Issue 19, 2024.

Frances Koncan, *Women of the Fur Trade*, Playwrights Canada Press, 2022.

Tonya Lailey, *Farm: Lot 23*, Gaspereau Press, 2024.

Judith Lapadat, *Mixed Messages*, Caitlin Press, 2002.

William 'Grit' Laskin, *The Stradivari Formula*, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2024.

Allison LaSorda, *Stray*, Goose Lane, 2017.

Joanne Lecuyer, *Search for the Lost Crystals*, Topsy Books, 2023.

Kathryn Lennon, 浮萍 *Duckweed*, NeWest Press, 2025 (forthcoming).

Dawn Macdonald, *Northernny*, University of Alberta Press, 2024.

Gloria Macher, *Mi Reina*, Editions Alondras, 2014.

Nick Marino, *East Side Story: Growing up at the PNE*, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2023.

Janice Lynn Mather, *Where Was Goodbye?*, Simon and Schuster, 2024.

Jerrold McGrath, *In Praise of Disorder*, self-published, 2023.

Josh Medad, *Tasha Is a Hero*, self-published, 2024.

Ishta Mercurio, *Small World*, ABRAMS Books for Young Readers, 2019.

Kelly Morrison, *Secrets in the Sand Dunes*, Black Rose Writing, 2023.

Emmanuel Mudakenga, *My Father's Son*, LivenBooks, 2023.

Arin Murphy-Hiscock, *The Green Witch's Garden*, Adams Media, 2021.

Sue Murtagh, *We're Not Rich*, Nimbus Publishing, 2024 (forthcoming).

Zehra Naqvi, *The Knot of My Tongue: Poems and Prose*, McClelland & Stewart, 2024.

Nancy O'Rourke, "Bravado," *Prairie Fire*, Vol. 44, Winter 2021-2022.

Jaz Papadopoulos, *I Feel that Way Too*, Nightwood Editions, 2024 (forthcoming).

Natalia Paruzel-Gibson, *A Picture Day to Remember*, Clavis, 2023.

Sujit Kusum Paul, *Yeats o Kobitay Naree o Nikunjo* (*Women and Domain in the Poems of Yeats*), Bengali Literary Resource Centre, 2016.

Robert Pepper-Smith, *The Orchard Keepers*, NeWest Press, 2017.

Kris Purdy, *Paradise Pending*, Bella Books, 2023.

Deepa Rajagopalan, *Peacocks of Instagram: Stories*, House of Anansi Press, 2024.

Christine Read, *Queenie Jean Is in Trouble Again*, Heritage House Publishing, 2024.

Sabrina Reeves, *Little Crosses*, House of Anansi, 2024.

Lisa Reynolds, *Pearls of Rain*, Beret Days Press, 2023.

Barbara Robinson, *A Cure for Spring Fever*, The Wild Rose Press, 2024.

Meaghan Rondeau, "Self-Portrait of the Author Fucking with Linear Time While Making No Love at All," *PRISM*, 2022.

Jessica Rose, *Let's Get Creative: Art for a Healthy Planet*, Orca Book Publishers, 2024.

Nadine Sander-Green, *Rabbit Rabbit Rabbit*, House of Anansi, 2024.

Elizabeth F. Shearly, *Dread Spring*, self-published, 2023.

Casey Shelley, "Left at Laverty," *Spray Paint Magazine*, Linton Press, 2024.

Jillian Shoichet, "You Get What You Get," *Mystery Magazine*, 2024.

Janet Simpson-Cooke, *Future Rivers*, Ragweed Press, 1987.

Sivan Slapak, *Here Is Still Here*, Linda Leith Publishing, 2024.

Dianah Smith, "Beyond Work/Life Balance: Racial and social inequality at work is alienating a 'pushed out' workforce," *The Monitor*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Winter 2016.

Douglas Smith, *The Lost Expedition: The Dream Rider Saga*, Book 3; Spiral Path Books, 2024.

Sarah Suk, *The Space Between Here & Now*, HarperCollins, 2023.

Nancy Taber, *A Sea of Spectres*, Acorn Press, 2024.

Liam Taliesin, *Lithium Fire*, Bookland Press, 2024.

Alison Taylor, *Aftershock*, HarperCollins, 2020.

Kai Thomas, *In the Upper Country*, Penguin Random House, 2023.

Peter J. Usher, *Joey Jacobson's War*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.

Laura Vanden Broek, "Between a Roc and a Hard Case," *Electric Spec*, 2023.

Giselle Vriesen, *Why We Play with Fire*, 100 Block Futures, 2024.

Susan Wadds, *What the Living Do*, Regal House Publishing, 2024.

Cecily Walters, *The Ghosts of Nothing*, self-published, 2023.

Tristis Ward, *Bones of The Magus: All that Remains*, Broken Jaw Press, 2011.

Jennifer Wenn, *Hear Through the Silence*, Cyberwit, 2022.

Bernard Wood, "Prisoner of Camp 33: A rare memoir recounts the experiences of a German PoW in Canada," *Canada's History*, 2024.

Teresa Wouters, *Creeboy*, Lorimer, 2022.

Laura Zacharin, *Common Brown House Moths*, Frontenac House, 2019.



ABOUT THE COVER ILLUSTRATOR



Farida Zaman is a Toronto-based multi-disciplinary artist and professional author-illustrator who is well known for her whimsical, uplifting illustrations in watercolour, gouache, acrylics, and digital art. Her extensive portfolio includes children's picture books, editorial art, educational publishing and food packaging, as well as licensing images on stationery, jigsaw puzzles, maps, posters, and more. Farida has called any different countries home, including the U.K., the U.S., and Canada. Farida describes herself as a global citizen with a natural flair for illustrating different cultures and stories related to travel, history, and diverse lived experiences. She trained in fine art and illustration at the Chelsea School of Art and later the Wimbledon School of Art in

London, where she graduated top of her class with honours. Her work has been exhibited at private shows and galleries and has received recognition and awards in Europe and North America. Farida teaches classes and workshops for adults and children at Toronto's Avenue Road Art School and previously at the Ontario College for Art and Design. She is a member of The Writers' Union of Canada, Society of Illustrators in New York, Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, and the Canadian Society of Children's Authors, Illustrators, and Performers. www.faridazaman.com.

At the Book Festival

BY ADA NICOLLE

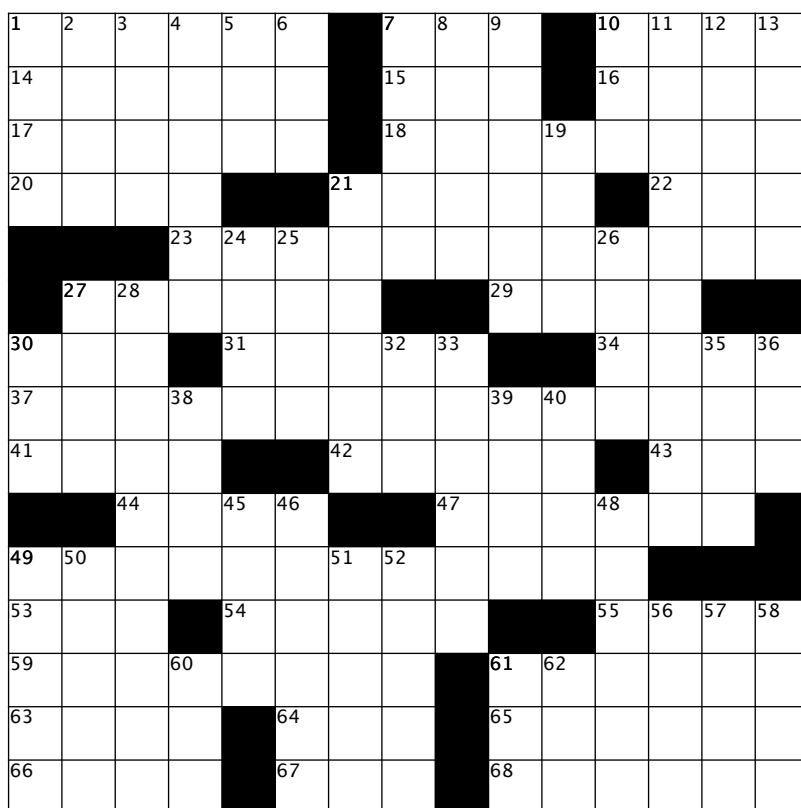
ACROSS

1. Worried (about)
7. Channel based in Manhattan
10. Apple desktop
14. Greek god that's the namesake of multiple NASA missions
15. "___ get back to you on that"
16. ___ Ren ("Star Wars" villain)
17. What you might find difficult to turn down at a book festival?
18. Started catching up to
20. "___ will always love you" (lyric belted by Whitney Houston)
21. Melona ice pop flavour
22. Every second letter of "loonie," aptly
23. What you can avoid at book festivals by buying paperback?
27. New pronouns after coming out as a trans woman, usually
29. Geromino Stilton's sister, in children's books
30. In the style of
31. Hailing from Éire
34. Big Five fixtures
37. What people are saying at a book festival?
41. "This Is How ___ It"
42. Damascus's country
43. Health cards and the like
44. Closing passage, in music
47. Assigns
49. Setting for a book festival?
53. Held onto
54. Grilled cheese ingredient
55. Some contraceptives, for short
59. Gender ___
61. "This party rules!" at a book festival?
63. Swampy area
64. Compete
65. Austrian city in a Billy Joel song title
66. Nothing special
67. Denouement, e.g.
68. "You sly dog"

DOWN

1. Type of bean
2. Following, as news
3. Off the market
4. Water passage
5. Tree that becomes a Muppet when you add an O
6. Female deer
7. Close but no ___
8. Bleu's counterpart on Quebec's flag
9. Very small
10. Actor Barinholtz
11. Clichéd excuse for not having homework
12. Not with anybody
13. Ice cream truck servings
19. "Stick Season" singer Kahan
21. Warrants
24. State on Lake Erie
25. "Hey ___, It's Ernest!" ('80s TV show)
26. Back area
27. Sour fruit used in cocktails
28. They're pressed for rounds
30. "That is ADORABLE!!!"
32. Like a kid that might hide behind their mom
33. Bearer of good news, you'd hope
35. They're picked up at pharmacies
36. Vancouver's Robson and Granville, for two (Abbr.)
38. Horn onomatopoeia in Nardwuar's classic sign-off

39. Grain container
40. Baby powder ingredient
45. Sleep ___ (concern for an insomniac)
46. Make an entrance
48. "Ah, thanks for the added context"
49. Sudden impulses
50. Medium for CBC Music
51. Start to work
52. Howled at, like the moon
56. Radius neighbour
57. Abbr. for an employed, childless couple
58. Remain
60. New start?
61. Hospital hookups, for short
62. Sardine container



? **ANSWERS:** portal.writersunion.ca/write-crossword-answers.

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A long-time member of The Writers' Union of Canada, Reid has published 18 books and has won more than twenty awards for his work. His poems and stories have been published in magazines around the world and his articles on fly fishing have been published in magazines, newspapers, and on websites across North America.

**Read the complete guidelines at
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To be eligible, an applicant must be:

- ▼ a professional writer engaged in the production of literary poems. Two books of traditionally published poetry is the minimum requirement.
- ▼ of modest means, having earned less than \$30,000 from all income sources in the previous tax year.
- ▼ a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, living in Canada.
- ▼ actively working on a literary project of poetry.

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