



No. 18: Spring/Summer 2020

**2020
Writing Contest
Results!**

Fiction

Non-Fiction

Poetry

**Judges'
Comments**

*Check out
our website*

www.nswriters.com

Write On!

The Winning Issue

President's Message

Sonia Garrett

Dear NSWA members:

I hope this newsletter finds you safe and well. In it, you will find the award-winning entries from the 2020 NSWA Writing Competition. Make a cup of tea, pour a glass of wine, enjoy and then connect with each other to share your thoughts.

Congratulations to all who took part. In my mind you are all winners, you had a story, put it down on paper and polished it, ready for the judges. That's our task as writers – to inspire, challenge, entertain and enhance experience through the written word. We are visionaries. We create something from nothing. Each and every project starts with a blank slate and an idea. Our work takes time, dedication and courage. It's not always easy but that's where the support of the NSWA comes in.

I look out of my window and see all the normal signs of spring — the snowline has receded, my cherry and apple trees have blossomed, and our local woodpecker has returned to drill out a mating call on our barbeque. Familiar sights and sounds seem so strange when the rest of life has been revolutionized.

Our meetings at North Vancouver Central Library have been cancelled,

our summer social at the Silk Purse won't be possible, but the NSWA is still here and the volunteers on the Executive are still working on behalf of the membership. Doug MacLeod and the Competition Committee ensured the competition went ahead despite the growing restrictions and unique obstacles faced as the realities of COVID-19 escalated.

Dare to be Heard has moved online – watch for the Zoom meeting link and join us from the safety of your phone or computer screen. Wiley Ho, our newsletter editor, has put this excellent Winners Edition together, and Janine Cross, our Speaker Co-ordinator will bring our May guest speaker into your living room (via Zoom).

This pandemic is life-altering, tragic for many, frightening and restrictive for others. Let's show the world, and each other, our solutions to ensure we remain connected to each other and the literary world here on the North Shore.

Make suggestions, volunteer to be part of the executive, and watch your ideas blossom as part of this visionary team.

Until we can meet in person, stay healthy, support each other, and keep writing. ■



Photo: Bing

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, in fact, that the storm is over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm, you won't be the same person who walked in.
- Haruki Murakami, from *Kafka on the Shore*

Welcome to this special issue of our NSWA newsletter. In addition to this year's winners of the NSWA's Annual Writing Contest, this issue also contains writing news, bulletins and pieces from our members.

During these unnerving times, I have been reading and writing more than usual. Perhaps you have, too. As you enjoy the varied and engaging stories and poems in the following pages, I invite you to marvel at the power of words and how, strung together one after another, they can carry us through dark storms into fresh and surprising worlds.

I wish you all healthy and creative days ahead, and look forward to receiving your submissions for the September issue of *Write On!*

Wiley Ho

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Next 100 Word Challenge Theme:

how I survived

Send your 100-word creation to
editornswa@gmail.com **by August 31, 2020**

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Newsletter Submission Guidelines

- Submissions from NSWA members only please.
- Send writing news (recent publications, book launches, notices, etc.) and your creations (poems, short fiction or non-fiction pieces up to 600 words) to editornswa@gmail.com, or by mail to NSWA, PO Box 37549 Lonsdale East, North Vancouver, BC V7M 3L3.
- Writing that appears in the NSWA newsletter is eligible for submission to the NSWA writing contest.
- Contributors are responsible for the accuracy, originality and reliability of their content.
- Check your submissions for spelling, grammar and punctuation prior to submission. Word attachments are preferred over email text.
- Publication in *WRITE ON!* is at the discretion of the Editor, in consultation with the Executive.

Disclaimer: Any views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor or the NSWA.

A Message from the Contest Committee Chair

I know you will enjoy reading the stories and poems in this year's winning edition of the newsletter. Some selections are moving, others thought provoking, and still others humorous. All are well written. Our contest continues to grow. Writers from outside of the North Shore Writers' Association are beginning to take notice and enter their work. It was inspiring to see more young writers participate this year. We look forward to these trends continuing in 2021.

You may notice that several winning authors are not publishing their work in this newsletter. This is not an unusual practice. These writers are ensuring that their poems or stories remain eligible for submission to other publications with strict rules about works not having previously appeared elsewhere, including newsletters and websites.

Several people need to be thanked for making the 2020 contest a success: Kelly Hoskins for promotion, Mark Turris for poster and bookmark production as well as assisting in collecting submissions, Chris Cowan and Barb Reardon for collecting submissions and contacting winners, and Wiley Ho for producing this Winning Edition of *Write On*. It was lots of fun to work with these energetic and dependable people. Once again, we had excellent judging by experienced local writers. Their professionalism was noticed and we thank them for their work.

The writing process is not finished until work is shared with others. If you didn't enter a piece this year, consider doing so in 2021. Even without an award, entering the contest forces you to up your game and revise a piece of writing to make it extraordinary. Everyone wins.

Congratulations to the winners and to all writers who entered the contest. North Shore Writers' Association members stand up and take a bow. You continue to create places where writers can meet, learn, and develop their craft.

Doug MacLeod



***North Shore Writers' Association
Annual Writing Contest
2020 Results***

Fiction

First Place: Laurie Crookell for *When a Tree Falls* *
Second Place: Albert Hoeberechts for *Driving Max*
Third Place: Libby Soper for *The Anniversary Cake*
Honourable Mention: Lynley Lewis for *Sons and Daughters*

Non-Fiction

First Place: Rod Baker for *Inside My Degree* **
Second Place: Laurie Crookell for *Dare to Climb* *
Third Place: Rose Dudley for *Tribute in a Rainforest*

Poetry

First Place: William Ellis for *Nemesis*
Second Place: Alex Hamilton-Brown for *Inukshuk* *
Third Place: Jannette Edmonds for *Poetry Party*
Honourable Mentions: Rod Baker for *From a Distance*
Julie Downsborough for *Seabreeze*
Edythe Anstey Hanen for *Highway One*

Youth

Winner: Lindsay Meng for *The Lowlands*

* *The author has requested not to publish their work at this time.*

** Those interested in reading *Inside My Degree* can contact the author directly at rodvbaker@gmail.com.



FICTION



Driving Max *Albert Hoeberechts*

Judge's comments: *Driving Max* features a younger, motivated character with a clear point of view who gets himself into some trouble. The story paints a personal picture of a different time and place as it dramatizes every youth's desire to experience freedom and autonomy.

Two weeks after my thirteenth birthday I screwed up. Big time.

Not by being caught with my hands in the salted licorice jar, or beating up my little brother, or even breaking windows at school. This was serious stuff.

It was quick. Impulsive. Probably hormone-fueled. But it happened.

It occurred on a snowy Toronto winter's day when I pleaded with my father to let me back my mother's car, a cute 1960 tan-coloured Morris Minor 1000, out of the garage and onto the street.

My father, a famous Dutch neurosurgeon, now relegated to the relative ignominy of the new world, was firmly imbedded in his favorite Lazy-Boy in our living room. After my ceaseless begging, he closed his ten-pound book of French poetry, squinted over his Pince-nez glasses, perched on the tip of his nose, said something tedious like, "I don't think that's such a good idea, Max."

To me it was one of those father-son moments, where the father thinks proudly 'My boy is growing up.' But from my point of view, he was squashing those growing-up moments with his simple, heavily accented English. Ordinarily, I only heard what I wanted to hear, and this time that meant I didn't hear him say "No". Therefore, I took it as a "Yes". C'mon, we all know when parents really mean it. You have to read between the lines, and you actually have years to suss out their true meaning. In my case, I had three languages and thirteen years to suss out his English, Dutch and French.

Loping with determination through the dining room to the back door, I knew instantly that my Dad would be proud of me if I pulled it off, especially after he told me many times that farmers in Holland learned to drive tractors at ten or eleven years old.

After a short sprint along the slippery sidewalk, I arrived at the doors of the garage, partially out of view from the kitchen window. We lived on a large corner property, and our house was a turn-of-

the-century mansion, with twenty-five rooms, paid for by the timely death of my dad's favorite aunt in Maastricht, in the Netherlands. Our backyard, surrounded by grey stuccoed walls on three sides, kept the riffraff out. Or maybe just the neighbours. Or it just kept us immigrants penned in. But the neighbours also had stone walls of their own, so we each had our own fortress. After all, it was Rosedale in the 1960s where no one talked to their neighbours. It just wasn't done. My mother was even told she couldn't hang her laundry or beat carpets on a line outside in our own backyard. That too, just wasn't done.

Too many frickin' rules for me. Luckily, I was pretty good at ignoring them.

The large garage doors creaked and groaned as I pulled the heavy iron latch open from the middle and opened them wide, like the maw of some great beast, ready to spit out some horses, which they probably did a hundred years ago. There was enough room inside for two carriages or maybe one small fire engine, but now there was just a Jaguar 3.8 litre, an MGB, a Morris Minor 1000 and several bicycles. Later a Norton 750 motorcycle and a Suzuki 80 would grace the centre isle. As I stepped inside, I ran my hands over the humped rear wheel well of the Morris like it was my new pony. It had good lines, I reckoned, but a greasy scent wafted out from the leaky underbelly. Dad used to complain about the electrical systems in British cars, but to me they worked just fine.

I realized my mother could see me from the kitchen window, so I had to be quick. It wasn't a big deal -- like, I had a cool three-speed Raleigh bicycle with racing handlebars and pink streamers in there, with the requisite hockey cards between the spokes and she had seen me take it out every day. But it was January, with a foot of snow falling overnight. She was no fool. Even for the Dutch, it wasn't good cycling weather.

I opened the driver's side silently. Adrenalin surged through my body, my pulse pounding at my temples. I tried to swallow but a lump the size of a snowball wouldn't co-operate. My right hand quivered as I pushed the key into the ignition and stepped on the brake and clutch pedal at the same time. I pulled the little black knob on top of the stick shift to the right and down, ramming it into reverse gear. I prayed it was the reverse. Sometimes my older sister put it into fourth gear by mistake and it made a terrible grinding sound. I looked twice on the diagram on top of the ball shifter. It seemed different from my usual vantage point in the passenger seat, but it felt right.

Reaching for the ignition switch, I snapped the key to the right, listened to the engine cough its way to life and slowly, ever so slowly, released the clutch, and the car started to roll backwards. Thank God it was backwards. I looked in the rear-view mirror, seeing nothing but spindly black trees and white bushes crusted with sugar whiteness on the other side of the street.

I gave the little British sedan more encouragement by stepping on the gas pedal with my right foot and looked again into the rear-view mirror. The only thing I didn't want to see was my father or mother, cursing away in Dutch, French or English.

What I saw was worse.

The curly blond hair of my 10-year-old little brother, Pincus, aka Pinky or Pinhead filled the mirror, with his face puffed up and contorted with a devilish grin. He could be a little shithead when he wanted to be. This was one of those moments. The little bugger had been sent out to check on me by my mother.

“What the hell are you doing?” he screamed. “I’m telling Mom and Dad.” He took off at a trot into the back porch and into the house. Of course, he knew what I was doing, I’d been telling him for weeks that I could do this. That I should do this. That I had friends who were doing this. Friends with skin magazines. Friends who were jerking off. Friends fondling the little plump titties of their girlfriends. Friends who were growing up faster than me. Driving a car would finally give me the edge I was looking for. Girls would chat with me about it, and guys would envy me. But the girls, oh, the girls, that’s what I really wanted. Barbara, Martine, Christine, Margaret, Sophie. They would be impressed and go for rides with me. “Fondle my boobs,” they would plead. And I would respond with something clever like “You’ll have to wait your turn.”

Forget bicycles! This is the new Max!

Time was running out. My mother and father would probably be there any second to scold me again for acting without thinking about the consequences, blah, blah, blah.

I added a little more pressure to the gas pedal and slid out of the garage slowly and carefully down the driveway. When the car crossed the sidewalk, I glanced to the gate at the side of the house and saw my mother and Pinky. Mom didn’t look happy.

The driveway from here sloped sharply downwards and I hit the street asphalt with a thud as the car dropped about six inches over the curb. The snowbank had covered the edge of the driveway, preventing me from seeing where the edge met the curb. My right foot slipped off the gas pedal. Panicking, I stabbed my right foot back on the pedal, for a brief second.

Too heavily.

The increased velocity shot the car across the street, smacking directly into a concrete telephone pole. The bumper caved in with a rending crunch like it was made of papier-mâché. The stainless-steel trunk handle snapped off and fell to the ground as the trunk lid gave way. The gas tank under the right rear of the car folded inwards like an accordion, scaping the surface of the road, causing sparks to fly, enabling a few wayward drips of gasoline to burst into flames.

After a silent beat, the ensuing explosion lifted the back end of car five feet into the air. I was bucked forward and cracked my forehead open against the windshield and my left arm was wrenched through the steering wheel. I heard the snap of a bone near my wrist, when the car landed again. Time seemed to stand still and the whiteness around me gave me the sensation of being in heaven. Like lying in the clouds.

Minutes later, after being pulled from the burning wreck by several arms and hands, I laid next to the curb making crimson snow angels on top of the side lawn. I couldn’t feel much of anything. I noticed the telephone wires above me vibrating through the cyan-blue backdrop of the winter sky.

Maybe some birds had just taken flight, or the power of the blast sent the wires into a pulsating quiver. The good news was that I couldn't see any chubby little cherubs sitting on the wires playing their harps. Not that I would ever make it to those lofty heights. It was all hellfire and brimstone for me.

Above my outstretched body I could hear the concerned voice of my father asking if could I feel this? and could I feel that? Then, move this and move that. After all he was a doctor. My arms and legs were okay except for the excruciating pain in my left wrist. The two-inch gash in my forehead was still oozing red stuff over the white carpet of snow, even after he had patched it up with some bandages from his medical bag. I needed stitches, but my Dad didn't seem too worried, so I wasn't too worried. But I also knew that my father was a cool and collected man under these kinds of circumstances. Maybe he was just being calm in front of my mother and brother to keep the stress level down. He had obviously seen a lot worse during the Second World War. Apparently, I was the only one who thought I was going to die in the next five minutes.

"You were lucky, Max, there was only a quarter tank of gas left in the car," said Pinky, trying to throw a positive spin on things. I thought, how the hell would he know that? I guess it was a question my father would have asked my mother. Or maybe he took it for a spin on his own and looked at the gas tank indicator.

Pinky left to get some aspirins out of the bathroom in the house, even after I said I didn't need any pills, but my wrist was really starting to ache, so I gave in minutes later. I swallowed four Tylenols and passed out in the back seat of the Jaguar, on my way to Toronto General Hospital.

The girls would have to wait. ■

The Anniversary Cake

Libby Soper

Judge's comments: *The Anniversary Cake starts off with a conventional tone before taking a turn for both the funny and the sinister. The writing maintains a light touch and a polished style while making the reader wonder and think.*

She checked the clock above the stove. Still plenty of time before the kids came home from school. She turned back to the cake, which waited for frosting, passive and compliant, like a woman anticipating her lover.

Seven-minute icing was ready in a bowl on the counter. A recipe from page 725 of *The Joy of Cooking*, a wedding present from her mother. Tattered and grease-stained, it still bore the inscription: "To my dearest daughter, in the hope that the fruits of this tome will find a sure way to Carl's heart for years to come. Devotedly, Mum."

She opened a drawer and rummaged for a spatula. In Carl's case, access to his heart now seemed to be gained via a more southerly route.

In recent years, her husband's tastes had shifted: tangos with Thai food, the raw pleasure of sushi, dalliances with minute amuse-gueule, forays into vegetarianism. Perhaps she didn't excel at experimentation in the kitchen, but she did have a solid repertoire of recipes at her fingertips. She had mastered the art of seven-minute icing, for example, a minor victory, regardless of the Rombauers' description of it as "a very fluffy, delightful icing that never fails." She'd been whipping it up to complement Lady Baltimore Cake (page 672, based on the batter for White Cake I, page 671) annually since their second anniversary, shortly after Melanie's birth.

They had chosen not to go out that year, unwilling to entrust their infant to the dubious care of a teenager, so they had stayed home to celebrate. She had laboured for hours over an elaborate meal: beef Wellington cooked just the way Carl liked it, tiny spears of asparagus swimming in lemon butter, the extravagance of early strawberries, and of course, the Anniversary Cake, as it came to be known.

The Anniversary Cake had pleasant associations, each year something special. That first time, Melanie for once quiet in her crib, they had finished dinner and moved to bed, where they feasted on the cake, stuffing succulent chunks into each others' mouths, sucking sticky fingers, giggling self-consciously. Carl had daubed her milk-heavy breasts with frosting, then licked them clean with deliberate sweeps of his tongue. Arching against his mouth, she felt her milk come down with a tingling rush of intensity like the onset of tears. Carl looked up hesitantly, as if for permission, closing his lips around a swollen nipple. His hair soft under her hand, she cradled his dark head to one breast and felt the other begin to weep in milky sympathy. Trembling pearls slid in slow rivulets down her side with each breath.

Then, for the first time since the birth, they had made love, Carl tender and tentative for fear of hurting her. After, as he lay stilled and softening, his breathing slipping toward sleep, the baby awoke, the first wail calling her milk again.

She paused, remembering. Slipping her hand under her blouse, she cupped a breast, grazed the stiffening nipple, pressed her pelvis hard against her other hand. It took several moments for the pulsing to ease. She shuddered, then briskly picked up the spatula and began frosting. That was many years ago. But the cake would be part of an anniversary ritual this year, as always.

An intense scuffle erupted in the walk-in pantry. Reaching over, she opened the door, and a large grey tomcat glided out, a small body dangling from his jaws. The mice had come in early this year, but Grendel kept them at bay. She watched idly, toying with an idea while spreading creamy swathes over the first layer, popping the second layer on top and starting to frost the sides. The cat paused in the middle of the kitchen and released the mouse. The tiny creature froze, sides pumping, then made a dash for the pantry. For a moment Grendel observed its efforts with an air of detached interest; then he crouched, tail quivering in tight, controlled spasms, and pounced with deadly accuracy. Returning to the middle of the room, he again freed his prey, this time intercepting its frantic sprint with a dart of his curved clawed paw.

Third time released, the mouse hunched motionless on the floor, as if trying to disappear into the pattern of the tiles. This seemed to bore Grendel, who batted at it several times before again grasping it in his mouth. With a toss of his head, he sent his small playmate in a graceful arc. It landed with a soft plop and began to inch sideways in hiccupping jerks, a faint brownish stain spreading behind it. The cat was instantly on it, gleeful.

Must be near the end, she thought, turning the frosted cake to inspect it from all sides. Perfect. Just enough time to decorate.

Methodically she assembled her tool: a cone-shaped pastry bag with a choice of removable tips. She chose her favourite one, which released in precisely the right width a smooth fluted stream of frosting. Into the bag she spooned pink-tinted icing, prepared from a special recipe (Decorative Icing or Twice-Cooked Icing, page 724) designed to set quick and hard for decorating.

She eyed the cake, marking with a toothpick the exact placement of the letters to ensure flawless symmetry. It was important to have a clear idea of the finished product before beginning: “As in any work of art, the concept must dominate the technique” (page 723, About Decorative Icings). Picking up the pastry bag, she hesitated for an instant, then began.

She had almost finished looping the L in Carl when a piercing cry shrilled from the corner of the kitchen. Starting violently, she marred the final curve. She cursed once, viciously, then corrected the blemish as best she could. The death-shriek continued to rise, awful in its jagged rhythm.

They get so shrill near the end, she thought contemptuously, Groveling for one more chance. Can’t they tell it’s all OVER?

Her hand contracted in a hard squeeze, spurting a jet of frosting across the cake. The shriek ended abruptly.

It took a few minutes to repair the damage. Then, steadying her hand, she continued smoothly through the ampersand and on to the second name, taking pleasure in keeping the extravagant flourishes perfect and even. It was going to be a work of art. Her best.

Grendel ambled over, arching briefly against her legs before dropping his trophy. Good boy, she murmured abstractedly. With a twitch of his beautiful tail, the cat proceeded to a patch of sunlight, where he stretched luxuriously and settled to clean himself with satisfied sweeps of his tongue, eyes slit in pleasure.

She stepped back to admire her work. It was perfect. *Happy 1st Anniversary, Carl & Chrissy*, the combination so pleasing, so euphonious, intertwined as if joined organically for eternity. Let no man put asunder.

Time for the final touch. With a satisfied nod, she bent and scooped the tiny mangled body from the floor. Taking the spatula, she pried up an edge of the cake’s top layer, then slipped the mouse into the opening, tucking the tail neatly behind it. She replaced the layer, wiped her hands, and carefully refrosted where the opening had been, restoring her creation to unmarred perfection. This accomplished, she lifted the cake and set it in a waiting box, which she had already marked FRAGILE, THIS SIDE UP. She taped it closed and wrote an address on it, checking the spelling from a scrap of paper she had unearthed from her purse.

At a sound outside, she glanced up and through the living room window saw a white van stopping in front of her house. They’re early, she thought. It will get there in plenty of time for dinner.

A man got out of the van and started up the walkway, consulting a small clipboard. This time she scrawled the two names close together above the address with brutal black strokes. Breathing heavily, she remained bent over the box for a moment. Then she straightened and started to giggle, hand pressed to her mouth.

The doorbell sounded. She picked up the Anniversary Cake and started for the door, smiling in anticipation. ■

Sons and Daughters *Lynley Lewis*

Jankibai sent her daughters by 4:00 am to wait by the communal tap. They would have a better chance of collecting water if they were first in line. Sometimes, the water was shut off before the allotted two hours causing fights among the waiting women. Lata and Saraswati sleepily collected buckets and made their way cautiously, trying to avoid stepping in waste or vomit in the dark. They joined the line of women and chatted quietly. Saraswati was eighteen but neither woman had any schooling. They worked as underpaid construction workers carrying heavy baskets of bricks balanced on their heads.

Jankibai looked older than her fifty-six years. She didn't know her exact age but remembered major events coupled with life's transitions. She remembered her eldest, Ashok, was born after two miscarriages at the end of the Great War and Saraswati, her youngest, at the start of the next. Kishore was born two years after Ashok. Three more miscarriages occurred, but then she gave birth to Lata in the mid 1920s. To her dismay, she got pregnant again and gave birth to another daughter; daughters were a burden in India. Her biggest worry in life was finding suitable matches for them. Unable to find a husband for the much older Lata, the neighbourhood matchmaker had turned her attention to Saraswati, who was receiving a lot of proposals. In fact, one of the families was coming to meet Jankibai's family tonight.

Jankibai walked to the open latrine at the edge of the slum. The Lohiyanager Slum was one of the biggest slums in Poona. Inhabitants salvaged tin sheets, metal biscuit cans, torn army canvas tarps and gunny sacks to create the semblance of a residence. The municipality provided two water taps for the slums. It was the slum dwellers' responsibility to look after their garbage and latrines. Infestations and vermin were rampant and electricity did not illuminate their hovels.

Her morning ablutions completed, Jankibai started the small primus stove and boiled water for chai. She kneaded some dough in a metal thali and expertly rolled some rotis while stirring a cheap but savoury potato curry. The girls returned, balancing a tub on their heads and holding a bucket in each hand. After breakfast, Jankibai pocketed a few rupees from a small locked cupboard, collected a cloth bag with two rotis and said goodbye. It would take her an hour by bus to reach her first household. Jankibai had been working as a servant for the Mehtas, old Mrs. Gupta and Mrs. Tadiwala's family since the age of seven.

For all the kindness shown to her by her employers, Jankibai had a troubled marriage. Her husband, Arun, was a drunkard. He started his mornings by beating her if she was too noisy and ended his nights pummeling her if the food wasn't to his liking. Thankfully, his drunken aim was more erratic at night. He bullied the children and was probably the reason why both boys had been bedwetters. Jankibai's salvation came in the form of a hit and run lorry driver who wasn't able to brake in time for her inebriated husband late one night. His parasitic presence wasn't missed. She independently cared for her children, scrimping money for their marriages and inevitable dowries.

She entered the Mehtas' house at 9:00 am from the back door. Kavita Mehta was standing near the fridge looking absentmindedly within.

"Namaste, Memsahib," Jankibai called out.

Kavita jerked and turned her head. "Namaste, Jankibai," she responded smiling.

She poured Jhanki some hot leftover chai in a special chipped mug she kept for her. Jankibai appreciatively sipped her hot chai made with milk which she could never afford. Kavita gave Jankibai her task

list and left to get ready for work. Mr. Mehta had already left on a three-day trip to Bangalore that morning. Jankibai cooked and cleaned while the Mehtas went to work at their nearby clinic. Both doctors worked long hours and would return home every evening to Jankibai's meals. Kavita would often give Jankibai leftovers in the fridge to take home. Once Jankibai even brought home a chocolate bar and her children were ecstatic.

Jankibai's mind was on the marriage proposal as she worked. She hoped the expected dowry wouldn't be too exorbitant. Women were valueless in this patriarchal society and only dowries protected them from abusive mothers-in-law. Women despaired when they gave birth to females because they foresaw a dismal future. Their only deliverance was to bear sons. Jankibai hoped the prospective family would be kindhearted. Her own mother-in-law had once threatened to burn her alive if she didn't fulfil her demands.

She dropped the house key off at Mrs. Mehta's clinic and visited her remaining households. She rushed home to prepare something special for her visitors. The matchmaker arrived at nine with the prospective groom's family. Jankibai knew she was at a disadvantage with no husband as head of her house.

"Ram, Ram!" proclaimed Shantabai, the matchmaker, as she made her dramatic entrance. This sacred invocation of the deity's name started the proceedings auspiciously.

"Ram, Ram!" answered Ashok, who had been invited for the visit. Everyone sat cross legged in a tight circle illuminated by a kerosene lamp. Horoscopes and family histories were examined. Jankibai called for a break in the proceedings by offering chai. Saraswati made a dramatic entrance, her face veiled by her dupatta. She demurely poured chai and offered a tray of pakoras and sugary sweet jalebis to the visitors. This allowed them to gawk freely while weighing her merits.

The discussion moved to the dowry, both parties keenly aware of societal expectations. When Jankibai mentioned it, the mother of the potential groom, Nirmalbai, brushed it aside as if it were unimportant. Jankibai knew better and persisted. She appealed to Shantabai listing her financial limitations. She named an amount she could afford.

Nirmalbai proclaimed theatrically, "My son would starve!"

This was an understatement considering both families lived in the same slum. Jankibai sighed. Negotiations had commenced. Sons were every family's opportunity to increase their wealth.

The haggling continued until Jankibai raised the dowry by several hundred rupees. The talk turned to meeting the temple's pundit and they confirmed the next meeting date. Jankibai was glad when they left. The boy had a steady job, came from a good family and Jankibai would have the additional advantage of having Saraswati live in the same neighbourhood. But she worried about the money. She decided she would ask Mrs. Mehta for a loan. Servants usually turned to employers for loans. She felt confident that Mrs. Mehta would help.

Mrs. Mehta was waiting for her in the kitchen the next morning. She wasn't smiling.

"Jankibai, did you clean the bedroom yesterday?" she asked.

"No Memsahib," Jankibai responded. "Do you want me to clean it today?"

Kavita shook her head. "I wanted to ask you if you saw a brown envelope in the bedroom or anywhere else."

“I don’t remember any brown envelope,” said Jankibai puzzled. “And I never went into the bedroom yesterday.”

“I can’t find that envelope anywhere,” said Mrs. Mehta with a perturbed air.

“Memsahib, what was inside?”

“Rs 500,” was the taciturn response.

Jankibai was silent. It was evident she was being unjustly accused of theft. Mrs. Mehta departed leaving behind a well of disquietude. Jankibai was unsettled as she completed her chores and could not eat her lunch.

The silence between them lay heavy over the next two days. Jankibai did her duties assiduously and the unmentioned envelope hovered like an ominous thundercloud. When Jankibai returned to work the next day, Mr. Mehta had returned from his Bangalore trip. Jankibai confined herself to the kitchen.

The next morning, Jankibai arrived early. Her sleepless night had resulted in a decision to hand in her resignation. She knew she wouldn’t get any reference. She really liked the Mehtas who had never admonished or even penalized her for the few days she had been sick and unable to work. She even got a magnanimous gift for each of her sons’ weddings.

Kavita was waiting for her in the kitchen with a fresh mug of chai for her. She smiled nervously at Jankibai. Jankibai opened her mouth to speak but Kavita beat her to it.

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about last Monday.”

Jankibai hoped nothing else had gone missing since the first incident and her heart sank.

During dinner the previous night, Kavita had turned to Vivek with a troubled look.

“I had a rather unpleasant surprise on Monday,” she began.

Vivek turned to her inquiringly, pausing his appreciation of Jankibai’s delicious eggplant curry.

“I think Jankibai stole the money I withdrew from the bank for the new fridge,” Kavita stated baldly.

“What makes you say that?” asked Vivek shocked.

“I haven’t seen the bank envelope since Monday,” she replied.

“The brown bank envelope?” he asked. “The one with Rs. 500? I told you it was in my jacket pocket.”

“Your jacket pocket?” Kavita gasped. “But when I asked you if you had enough money on Sunday, I meant did you go to the bank and withdraw money?”

“No,” replied Vivek. “I took the bank envelope because I assumed that you withdrew the money for my expenses.”

Kavita was mortified. “I’ve practically accused Jankibai of stealing,” she exclaimed.

“How could you?” questioned Vivek. “Nothing has ever gone missing.”

“I know,” said Kavita. “But there’s been no one here but her since you left. What was I to think?”

“That’s just awful,” said Vivek.

“I agree,” said Kavita. “I feel awful. We haven’t spoken since Monday. I can’t imagine how she feels. How can I ever make it up to her?”

They sat in silence for a while, their food forgotten. After a while, Vivek turned to her. “You know something?” he started.

Kavita looked expectantly at him.

“I think I have a solution,” he said, smiling. “You know we were thinking of selling the old fridge which is too small for us now. Why not make a gift of it to Jankibai?”

Kavita stared at Vivek open mouthed and lunged to hug him. “What a brilliant idea,” she exclaimed. “Oh Vivek, that’s a perfect solution! I couldn’t bear the thought of upsetting such a sweet old thing.”

“You’re so wonderful to her, she’d forgive you anything,” said Vivek as he kissed her goodnight.

Jankibai now stared at Kavita tensely.

“I forgot where I put the brown envelope,” said Kavita, not wanting to incriminate Vivek. “I found it yesterday. I can’t imagine why I was so forgetful. I’m sorry I made you look everywhere for it. It was my fault.”

Jankibai knew Mrs. Mehta was glossing over her prior silent accusation but didn’t mind. She was just relieved that the shadow of guilt had been lifted. She genuinely liked the Mehtas and had been troubled when she decided to quit. She remained mute.

“You know that Sahib and I have been recently thinking of buying a new fridge to replace our small one,” Kavita continued. “It still works well so we’d be very happy if you’d accept this fridge as a gift.”

Jankibai was shocked beyond belief at the munificence. No one in their slum had a fridge, new or otherwise. She thanked Mrs. Mehta so profusely that Kavita turned and fled in embarrassment. The rest of the day passed in a blur. Jankibai burned the rice for the first time in her life and had to make a new batch immediately. She answered Mrs. Gupta in monosyllables who was quite put out that Jankibai didn’t seem to be in the mood for conversation.

That evening, she made a beeline for the matchmaker’s house.

“Namaste, Jankibai,” said Shantabai as Jankibai entered her shack. “Have you got a response for Nirmalbai?” She had a sinking feeling that Nirmalbai’s expectations were too high for Jankibai to fulfill.

“Yes, I have,” said Jankibai triumphantly with a faintly smug smile. “How would they feel about having a fridge for their home?” ■



NON-FICTION



Tribute in a Rainforest

Rose Dudley

Judge's comments: *There is elegance, beauty and compassion in this short piece about a memorial to a child in a woodland garden. It is an unusual story, well written and presented, and with thoughtful quotes. Although this is a non-fiction piece, I had the impression the content would adapt comfortably to a long prose poem.*

That year, the rain throughout November and December had been relentless, so the gathering crowd was in high spirits due, undoubtedly, to the long-overdue and sudden change in the weather.

It was only three days until Christmas so there was a chill in the air, but a scarcely perceptible skim of frost, covering the ground and the trees, would soon disappear as the sun climbed above the mountain ridge behind us, with the promise of a beautiful winter's day.

While neighbours greeted each other with warm hugs and handshakes, chatted animatedly about Christmas plans and introduced themselves to the few newcomers who had come to join our weekly hike during their holidays, my eyes became fixated on the unbridled joy of a child tearing around the cul-de-sac with a dog which was barking in delight as she made a show of offering its leash and then pulling it away each time the dog jumped for it.

She was oblivious to the crowd, until the group began to move up the trail, then anxious to be in front she ran ahead, with her brother and another child, screeching with laughter, the dog yapping and nipping at her heels.

I did not know, at the time, why, in the future, I would remember that child in such vivid detail—the messy, uncombed hair, the rainbow striped skirt, the multi-coloured spotted tights, the purple running shoes, the absence of a winter coat on such a cold day but oversized mittens and a sweater which might easily have belonged to her father—all, I would learn, revealing so much about the child she was—tough, self-willed and free-spirited.

Now, years later, as I rest awhile here in this garden of memories which we felt such a pressing need to create in the forest for her and perhaps, for ourselves, I try not to reflect on the horror that ensued that fateful day devastating that child's family and affecting many of us for life. I want to block out the sight of that falling boulder, the sound of panicked screams, the disbelief of a mother who had,

until that moment, been sitting happily beside the stream casually munching on an apple. I want to close my mind to the sight of those attempting to breathe life into that damaged little body, the droning noise of helicopters overhead, the wailing of sirens and, most vividly, the utter despair on the faces of those who stood silently and helplessly by.

I no longer seek answers to those interminable questions--why? -- what if? -- if only? I do not dwell on anomalous incidents which, in retrospect, may have been harbingers of what lay in store for us that day. I want this place to become a sanctuary for all, a place of peace, somewhere to reflect and to heal, a place in which children can delight, where we can linger to pay homage to the lively little girl we all once knew.

Today, alone in the garden, I see her smile in the sun's rays that shine through the cedars and her sparkling eyes in the flashes of blue between. As I sit beside the bubbling stream tumbling down the mountain, I remember her infectious laughter as she tore around the cul-de-sac with her dog that morning. At times, when we are maintaining the garden, her love of nature and animals manifests itself through the worms and bugs scuttling through the freshly turned earth.

I reflect on her young life mirrored in spring's tender new growth and when winter comes, I think of her supple limbs as the trees bend over in the wind and of her headstrong nature as they endure against the storms. In winter, when the rains come, I am reminded of tears shed, and when snow blankets this memorial garden it speaks to me of her warmth. Her love of colour, so predominant in my mind that day, is captured in the decorative mementos that have been hung here over the years in these magical surroundings--all representing something of her as a person—colourfully painted rocks displaying heart-felt messages to a lost friend, shiny Christmas balls, prayer flags, depicting all of nature's elements, and other souvenirs from around the world, banners designed by local artists, dream-catchers, animals and birds, angels, stars and rainbows, even a jungle gym which she had loved so much and a miniature soccer pitch. Every single offering has a tender memory attached and is a token of a person's love and honour.

Sometimes, in the stillness when no wind whispers, I wonder what unseen hand stirs those ornamental offerings? Sometimes, I question who could have watched so carefully over those precious treasures, as branches, and even giant trees have fallen all around them over the years. Sometimes, I sense a presence here and imagine I hear a child's voice in the chirping of a little wren hopping around my feet. I watch silently and I wonder. I am reminded of the words of one, Nicholas Adams:

“Listen to my footprints in your heart, I am not gone but merely walk within you.”

Strangers who pass through may pause and wonder at what they discover in this special place and then continue their journey with no knowledge or understanding, but one passer-by became so engaged in learning about its history that he decided to leave a note inside a miniature gondola. He wrote about how he had stumbled upon the garden and wanted to thank neighbours for what they had created and how enchanted and moved he was by an experience which he felt compelled to share with others when he returned home to the other side of the country. His message, scrawled on a black and white picture depicting a forest scene had been hurriedly sketched, and he had signed his name—Christian.

Christian, on his mission, had followed a series of capital letter E markers, hand beaded and strung up in the trees, not knowing what they represented until signs further on became clues to what he would gradually piece together.

In his own story, he told us that he had not chosen to find out what had happened until he had really absorbed, in its entirety, this fascinating garden; all he cared to know was that whatever this little girl did, or fought or was fighting must have been of such significance that an entire community had banded together to literally alter the face of a mountain. That, he felt was compelling enough. It was obvious to him that the community at large so loved, and so cared for what had happened to this young child that they came together to create a tribute for the ages. When he left his note, he still didn't know what had really happened, but he knew that he had to speak to someone who did. He explained: "I had lounged in her sunbeams, splashed my face in her creek and walked between her fallen trees."

Christian may never know how his words have touched those of us who are an on-going part of this story. We want to believe that his experience is shared by all those strangers who pass by this spot and are in some way uplifted and restored by their visit as Christian was that day.

Each year, on the anniversary of the accident, friends and families gather to take a memorial walk up to what has become known as the Enchanted Forest. It has been five years now, but the number of people who want to remember a little girl who would never come home to open the gifts that awaited her under the Christmas tree--whose life was snuffed out in an instant, keep increasing as do the trinkets that hang in the forest in her memory. The walk has become a tradition which brings everyone in our small village together in a show of love and support for a family whose loss can never be measured.

A jagged hole has been torn in the lives of those left behind. For her parents, older brother and extended family, it is a hole that cannot be refilled but, as time passes, the rawness for friends and neighbours has begun to lose a little of its edge. In a tightknit community such as ours, we can never forget the tragedy, and we will all continue to remember details of that fateful time in our own way.

Looking to the skies that night, many still recall, in wonder, the exceptional brilliance of the moon and stars as we clung together to sing Christmas carols around a makeshift memorial. Others speak of the eagle seen soaring high above the mountains for days following the tragedy.

For me, the memory of a carefree child with a zest for life, tangled hair and a passion for colour will endure in a forest garden immortalized out of collective love. ■



POETRY



Nemesis *William Ellis*

Judge's comments: *Nemesis plus its subtitle frame this talented poet's clear intent with emotional power in 6 quick lines. As this verse flows from Parent's decades to Children's love, this poem offers solace and clarity for our own losses. Yes, by the winner's excellent use of believable dialogue, I believe its honesty gained from decades of family life or its loss.*

Nemesis
Montreal, Canada - Koh Tao, Thailand

"He says he does not love me now."
My daughter's voice, borne on dark wings,
from halfway round the world
where all is snow,
dissolved my casual paradise
of sand and turquoise sea.

I pictured her, as long ago,
when she first heard those words
said not to her, but by another to another, words
she does not now remember, words
that I cannot forget –

*for they were mine one winter day:
her mother's white, drained face, a blur,
my shaking hand upon a door,
the warmth escaping from the room,
and in the shadows, by a corner,
a little girl, wide-eyed and open mouthed,
awakened from her sleep.*

I thought to say: "your mother
and your father must have doomed you."
I said only, "come to me."

*

And here, by ordinary miracle, jet-lagged, pale,

but *here* – she is beside me,
with her own child, tiny girl,
held in her arms,
and I can tell her

love is always fugitive,
an outcast who is taken in –
and fed and clothed and warmed beside the hearth -
who one night breaks the latch
and lurches into howling wind
forgetting all who cared for her,
and barefoot, makes her way
beside some broken palings
where the snow lies deeper
than the sand we walk on this warm night
(full moon, a shoal of stars around Orion
in a sky so southern
that we cannot find the pole star)

as the sea, the fire whirling in the air
tossed by lithe limbs,
and paper lanterns rising
over waves, repeat themselves,
as she and I repeat
an ancient story,
which her child, asleep against her,
cannot guess:

how young, the doors of our small rooms are open,
and memories are small as well, and what we are
is not what we have lived,
but all we hope for, and how love
is waiting in our future,
certain as the milk we drink.

And then we learn: the world is wide,
but it has narrowed, all the lives
that led to us are ours, and what the future is
was once the past, and all our wanderings
will lead us to a time and place
where all that we remember,
and all that we can hope

become the same.

Poetry Party

Jannette Edmonds

Judge's comments: *A delightful poem about artistic addictions: whether a landscape painter, a drummer or a storyteller. This is the finest poem I've ever read about being a word addict, trying to explain one's constant search for the best-chosen words to explain what one is feeling as well as thinking — in any one moment. Poets struggle to control and rearrange words as better and better lines appear or not. They delete new choices as better lines or not, as addicts are rarely satisfied.*

Poetry meets me at the door,
Beckons me enter
The inviting space of warmth
And creative order.

Come stroll between the lines,
Luxuriate in images,
Take up a cause imbedded in a phrase,
Make amends with a metaphor.

Scream quietly if you must,
Sob into the soft white vellum.
A pen, mightier than a sword,
Bleeds thought all over the page.

Poetry never abandons.
It points my finger back at me,
Letting me get away with nothing.
It meets me at the door
And never lets me go.

Sea Breeze

Julie Downs brough

somewhere
a summer sea
of turquoise eyes
that filter depths
of shallow pools

somewhere
a summer sea
that to my fishy tongue
and wriggling nose
brings seaweed salt

somewhere
a summer sea
of water dripping
through
my pebble toes

somewhere
a summer sea
with the resounding whisper
of an ocean
in my seashell ear

somewhere
a summer sea
with tan-limbed light
reflecting from
my phosphorescent home

somewhere
a summer sea
that even in the midst of
winter
caresses with waves
my ocean heart

From a Distance

Rod Baker

Little glimpses — scenes of gold,
a village life, I'm nine years bold,
enjoying winter's frozen things,
bursts of nesting birds in spring,
emerald leaves are clothing trees,
the lazy buzz of bumble bees,
horse chestnut flakes are tumbling
down,
I'm crunching through them on the
ground.

The innocence of not knowing
much,
about failure, fear, lost love's cold
touch,
judging, shame, feeling less than,
uncertain how to be a man.

I miss a world where chickadees
chattered,
poetry rhymed,
typewriters clattered,
the freshness of young dreams still
mattered.

Highway One

Edythe Anstey Hanen

California trucker leans into
sunburnt afternoon, careens
against highway shoulder, tires spit
gravel, stir up small tornados
of dust. First ride:
Salem to San Francisco in a truck
carrying 72 tons of cedar shakes.

His photo life, pinned
to the dashboard: girl/wife,
child, a small mean-eyed dog,
windows shuttered bleak
against a tired
wood frame house.
The Virgin
dances,
blue-starred cloak
slapping against
windshield grime.

Highway to the coast: Newport,
Yachats, the dunes near Florence:
scaped drifts of sand, bulwarks
against a storm-coloured sea.

Highway swath cuts south
Crescent City, Eureka,
San Rafael to Walnut Creek
Midnight we climb
out into
the waiting dark, thoughts
unravel, like used-up
string, eyes
raw with road grit.
My body
still hums
against sharp curve
of coastline, sea roar, the grind
of earth and highway.

The trucker grins, slings one arm
over the wheel and says:
*That sure was some sort of a pretty
run.*



YOUTH WINNER



The Lowlands

Lindsay Meng

Judge's comments: *The Lowlands begins with a tense encounter between brother and sister and builds to dramatic climax. The writing is tight, colourful and nuanced.*

I wake up to the cold glare of the morning sun. Ren isn't at home. He must have woken before the dawn to go to a protest.

Before, Ren was so shy. The protests have changed him, I know they have. Yet I cannot seem to stop him from going.

He comes back before noon, crimson with blood that isn't his. I'm grateful that my Ren isn't injured but sad that someone else's Ren was.

"The change will come yet," he says in his soft, wistful voice, "It must."

I hand him an old rag to wipe the blood off his face. It was once white, but the grime and dust of time has turned it as grey as the morning sky.

People have been whispering of the change for as long as I can remember. I cannot imagine a change. I cannot imagine a life that is different from my life, here, in the Lowlands.

"They tell me, Rilla, that once there was no separation. No Lowlands and Highlands. It is my duty to fight for you and the children of today, and tomorrow. Soon, Rilla, there will be no separation, soon," Ren says this with such an intense look in his grey green eyes that I find myself believing him, believing that such a change will come. But of course, it never will.

I head to the Grotto in the dwindling sunlight to purchase our day's meal. I would have gone earlier, but the heat made that impossible. The landscape around me is bleak and black. Every plant, every living thing, is withered and dying.

The stale, putrid smell of smoke and grease breaks me from my reverie. The sight of the Grotto is even worse than the smell, all misshapen tents and screaming vendors.

Sal, a fat and kind-hearted old woman, hobbles over to me, her wooden leg scratching against the ground. “How yer makin out over ther, Rilla?”

She seems to be drunk, so I don’t waste too much time talking to her. I sift through the bins of rancid cheese and bread, picking out the few pieces I think I can stomach. The Lowlands are only provided with the vittles that the Highlands reject. We don’t have the luxury of passing on spoiled food.

The door to our shack is long gone, replaced with a stained sheet I hung over the crooked frame. My eyes slowly adjust from the blinding sun outside and fall on our meager possessions.

A cot for me, and a bundle of cloth on the ground for Ren. My mother’s clothes, folded neatly and left in a corner. That’s all. I drop the cracked, leather pouch that holds our coppers, and eat my portion of the food. Since Ren isn’t home, I set his cheese and bread on the cloths.

Lying on my cot in the dark, I wonder where Ren is. It seems that I’m always wondering where Ren is nowadays. I remember, back when mother was still alive, Ren never ignored me. Wherever he was, I was there also.

A bang of the door snaps me awake.

“Rilla,” a hoarse voice calls, “Rilla come with me.”

I scramble to my feet and stumble across the splintered wood floor to Ren.

“What is it, Ren. What is it!” I say, my voice shaking. He is dressed completely in black and stained with blood. I don’t stop to wonder where he got the clothes. I run after Ren; my feet bloodied from the sharp gravel. My stringy hair is flying in my mouth and face.

Where is Ren taking me?

I stop in amazement.

“Ren,” I call, wind whipping my hair and shirt around, “Are you taking me to the Highlands?”

He doesn’t answer at first. I don’t hear him if he ever does.

Darci is a chubby, placid child of nine, the mayor’s daughter. Looking down from the third floor of her stately home, she asks, “Daddy, why are there people outside?”

There are hundreds of jostling people, yelling threats at the whitewashed façade of the mansion.

“Ren!” I scream into the night, “Ren, where are you?”

All around me, the noise and the cries of the crowd stop. Everyone’s attention is fixated upon the rough outline of a figure, standing on the marble steps.

Could it be? I wonder.

“People of the Lowlands! We have rallied here tonight in search of an answer, the answer to the question asked by us, our ancestors, and our children. When will this tyranny end? When will we get the democracy we deserve?” my brother screams from the steps.

A shot fires through the darkness.

I see the figure fall. He drops to his knees. I am sure his eyes are on me as he takes his last breath.

A man from the crowd yells for us to charge. The pressing crowd around me stampedes into the grand building. People throw their torches into the billowing, velvet curtains. Tapestries worth more than all our earthly goods combined are ripped. Officers come at some point, but there are too many of us.

All I can see is that figure, dropping.

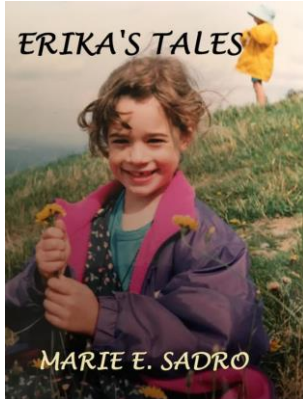
That night was the night of the change, long awaited. From then on, there was no separation. I can remember nothing from that terrible darkness in my memory, except for that lone figure, dropping, on those white marble steps, built on the backs of suffering people.

I seem to be a different person now. As if my brother sacrificing his life for mine has changed me, left a permanent mark on my tarnished soul.

My story will be passed down through the voices of time, to make sure that no one, no sister, no wife, no father, will ever have to lose their Ren again. ■

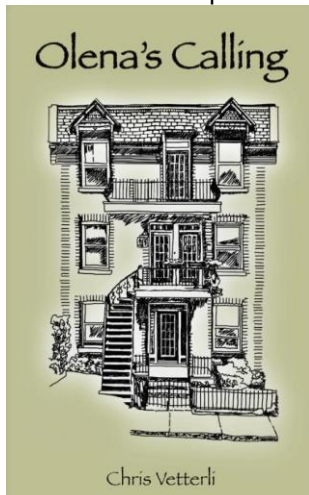
BRAVO!

Congratulations to **Marie Sadro** for the release of her latest book *Erika's Tales*, a collection of amusing short stories for children. The stories encourage children's gift of imagination and leave them with happiness in their hearts. The book is available from Amazon and Kindle.



Kudos to **Chris Vetterli** for the release of her novel *Olena's Calling*. It a story of loss and reconnection, of transitions and settling, of love and despair. Olena uses her telephone as an instrument of her "calling". She is the loving central grapevine of her family, tying them all together. When she dies, who will take her place?

Even with careful planning and steadfastness, or not, surprises dictate the direction of everyone's journey. Set on both sides of the Atlantic, in Eastern Europe and Canada, follow Olena's family as life unfolds. The book is available in print or e-book on Amazon.



Brava to **Martha Warren** for *mother talk*, a collection of ten poems on motherhood by emerging Vancouver poets. The fresh local voices explore the complexities of mother figures, and the power of maternal influence. Poems by Barbara Carter, **Trish Gauntlett**, Zofia Rose Musiej, Steffi Tad-y, and **Martha Warren**. Martha was also editor for the volume, which was released in time for Mother's Day. The collection is available from Apple Books and Amazon.



Hats off to **Joyce Goodwin** for keeping creatively prolific with both her writing and painting. An active member of the North Shore Artists Guild, Joyce was approached in late 2019 to write a poem to accompany a painting by Elizabeth McLaren. Earlier this year, she was invited to compose and read a poem for a friend's 80th birthday celebration at Van Dusen Gardens. On Feb 1st St. Brigid's Day, Joyce was part of an SFU Harbour Centre project to honour Irish women for which she wrote a piece about Irish writer Edna O'Brien.

Congratulations to **Mary Chang** for the publication of her story "**Reconnecting with my 1979 Grade 3 teacher, Lindsay Watson**" in Teacher Magazine (Jan/Feb 2020 issue). To read the story, visit marychangstorywriter.com.

A collective BRAVO to all you wordsmiths out there - sung and unsung.
Write on!
Share your recent writing news by sending an email to editornswa@gmail.com.

Member Writing

Writing Risk

Rod Baker

Worried about making mistakes when you write? The only people who *never* make mistakes, are those that never try anything new. One of the early lessons we learn as writers is that in order to have a journey worth telling, the hero must 'grow' as the story unfolds. What does growth mean? It means, operating outside our comfort zone, risking something new, a leap into the unknown. You won't die. You will grow.

Recently, our newsletter editor suggested an interesting 100-word challenge prompt: From a Distance. I laughed. Heading toward my mid 70s, practically every aspect of my life is becoming 'from a distance.' But could I describe that feeling, create coherent meaning in a mere 100 words? Risky!

In the Eighties, I used to write poetry just for myself to capture emotional milestones in my life, seek out and understand my feelings. Maybe writing a poem would work for this challenge, but my private poetry would become public — risking judgement. Writing poetry that rhymed? Out of fashion! Another gamble.

I'm always moved by the Japanese saying, "Fall down seven times, stand up eight." Those simple words smack of courage, resilience. When trying to write this darned poem, it fell down seven times, many more. I cussed, complained, almost quit, but didn't. The elusive kaleidoscope of a hundred variables shape-shifted with each reading until finally distilling into three verses that captured a truth inside of me.

Isn't that the essence of writing, creating inside and risking bringing it outside?



Photo: Bing

Lawson Creek Studio remembered. *Joyce Goodwin*

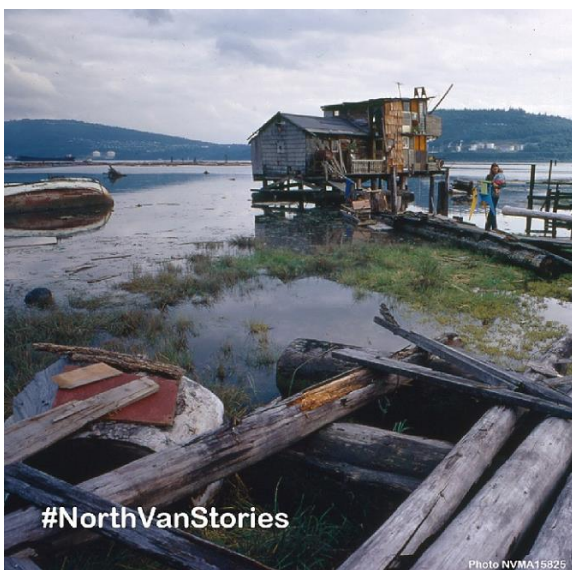
Multiple pigments of colour and hue,
in tone a depth of vision always changing,
stories painted on surfaces that shimmer,
drift into rainbows or slip away into shadows;
once held captive in a moment of obsession
a painting emerges from absence, no longer
imagined, transformed by sweeps of colour.

Lawson Creek studio was demolished.
Memories resided deep inside its walls,
deep within the minds of artists, retelling
with paint the stories of cities and cathedrals,
flower gardens and wilderness, steam engines,
elephants and ice-cream, oceans alive
with ships and wonders of the deep.

Lawson Creek studio was a special place
inhabited by visionaries, re-imagining
and recording our time, not a mirage,
we were there, we have our work to prove it,
creations of the human heart and soul,
we belonged in that place painting and creating
a legacy, for our north shore home

Bulletin Board

North Vancouver Museum & Archives wants your stories



The North Vancouver Museum and Archives is exploring innovative ways to document the experience of our North Vancouver community during COVID-19. **#NorthVanStories** is your opportunity to share your stories in real time.

We invite you to send us digital images, journal entries, drawings, videos and anything else that expresses how you are feeling and what is important to you at this time. Simply submit your digital content to us using the hashtag **#NorthVanStories** on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Each week, we'll be sharing a different content prompt on our social media channels. The NVMA is creating a unique digital collection that will be preserved for future generations to explore, study and understand the diversity, strength and creativity of the North Vancouver community.

Check out <https://nvma.ca/northvanstories/> to see what others in our community are sharing with us and be sure to share **#NorthVanStories** with your community.



The **NSWA Facebook page** is up and running! Check it out for upcoming NSWA events, information of interest from other literary groups, and notices of member book launches and readings. It's a great place for our members to publicize their latest writing news. Several outside groups have already contacted our members through it!

Do you have something to share on our NSWA Facebook page?

Please send it (edited and ready to copy/paste) to Janine at janinecross@shaw.ca. Photos must be in jpg or png format.

Note: In order to give everyone a chance to be featured on the page, new books by NSWA authors will be posted only once on Facebook and will not include external links.

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Doug MacLeod

Members At-large

Christine Gowan, Barbara Reardon

North Shore Writers Festival Liaison

Sonia Garrett

A hearty thank-you to all of our volunteers for their dedication and hard work!

Events Calendar

May 25 **General Meeting and Guest Speaker
Tilar Mazzeo (via Zoom)**

June 3 **Dare To Be Heard (via Zoom)**

August 31 **Submission deadline for
fall newsletter**

Summer Break

Sept 21 **AGM and Election**

Winsome Quotes

"I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn."

--Anne Frank

"Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it's the only way you can do anything really good."

--William Faulkner

"If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."

--Toni Morrison

Write on!



The North Shore Writers' Association thanks the North Vancouver City Library for their generous support of our ongoing activities and special events, and also for their support of all local writers and readers. The Library plays an active and varied role in the cultural life of our community - for more information and to find out how to participate, go to: www.nvcl.ca

The Last Page

Cathy L. Scrimshaw

Lately I've been thinking a lot about the nature of creativity, mostly because I've been in a creative slump myself. Why is it that some of us feel driven to create, whether it be through writing, art, music or dance? What is it that makes a person good at a creative endeavour, or maybe even great? Is there a difference between 'creative' and 'non-creative' people?

I asked my neighbour, a neuroscientist, if creative people (artists, writers, musicians and choreographers) have brains that are measurably different from others. Always generous with information, he was quick to give me his answer. In musicians, the brain region called the planum temporale, especially the left one, appears larger on MRI scans, and the earlier the musical training begins, the larger that part of the brain is. Another interesting fact is that architects are more likely to be left-handed than the rest of the population; are their brains different from the rest of us? He noted that while the left hand is governed by the right hemisphere of the brain, the old ideas of "right brained" people and "left brained" people have not held up under scrutiny, and that terminology has been abandoned by scientists.

He also sent me a link to a recent study on the brains of dancers. It's fascinating stuff. Of those who participated, the brains of dancers were different from those of the non-dancers; some of those differences surprised me, and in fact, one of the results I was expecting to see wasn't there at all.

My neighbour added that in principle, the brains of people who have any particular ability must be different at some level, because the brain is where all of our talents reside. But as far as scientists know now, brains are far more similar to one another than different.

Okay. That's a glimpse into the science of the issue. Now, one of the joys of belonging to a writer's association is the opportunity to turn to other writers for support and inspiration when the going gets tough. This column was one of those times for me. So I asked three of our accomplished members to give me their thoughts on creativity, in a single sentence if possible, just to see what they would come up with.

Novelist Diana Stevan (www.dianastevan.com) had this to offer: *For a writer, creativity is when the artist within you organically comes up with an unexpected word, phrase, sentence, or notion that changes your writing from the mundane to the sublime.* This appeals to me. I imagine some part of the brain, the area that contains imagination, if such an area exists, merrily rolling along until, for some unknown, almost magical reason, it spits out something totally unexpected that then becomes the seed of a new poem, article or story.

Jackie Bateman, novelist and screenwriter, (www.jacbateman.com) sent the following: *Creativity in writing is the ability to view the world through fresh eyes (that's the lovely bit) and to translate that view onto paper for the reader in a compelling way (that's the hard bit).* This seems to take the writer to the next step. Having that

inspirational moment is wonderful, but it's the beginning of the journey, not the whole trip. There's still work to be done before our creation is complete. We can't count on our imagination alone.

Joan Boxall, poet, memoirist and travel writer, (www.joanboxall.com) says: *Perhaps we can safely say, it's all about honing, honing, honing...like Michelangelo said of his 'David': "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free."* I think that, for us writers, honing means editing, editing, and editing some more until we've got it just right. Not just right for the critics, or for our family and friends, but just right for what we, as the creator, are trying to say.

I'm comforted by the fact that creativity appears to be as much a mystery for neuroscientists as it is for me. I'm sure researchers will get an answer eventually. Or maybe creativity and imagination are too amorphous to quantify, and we just have to fall back on that old saying 'I know it when I see it'. And I like the fact that our three writers have given us a roadmap we can all follow in our creative efforts. To me, that means hard work and perseverance will always be part of the equation for creative success, even if we're not all natural geniuses.

Creativity is intelligence having fun. That sentence has long been attributed to Albert Einstein, although some of my internet research disputes that. No matter. Those words make sense to me. So I think I'll get out my notebook and pen, then go sit outside on the back deck and have some fun. And I hope you do too! ■