



No. 24: Fall 2021

Upcoming Meetings

October 18

In-person Meeting
with Guest Speakers
Rhea Rose and
Linda Demeulemeester

November 15

Guest Speaker TBC

January 17

Guest Speaker
Jasmin Kaur

Meeting formats

The October meeting is confirmed for in-person at NV City Library (unless public health guidelines change). Future monthly meeting format TBC.

Dare and Saturday Morning Write-ins will be held on Zoom.

Check our website for updates and past newsletters!
www.nswriters.org

Hyperlink tip!

If your computer does not open hyperlinks, copy and paste the website address to your browser.

Write On!

Newsletter of the North Shore Writers' Association
Linking North Shore writers since 1993

President's Message

Janine Cross

I am very pleased to welcome both new and returning members to NSWAA's 2021/22 season. I look forward to meeting you all in person, on Zoom, or email. I am pleased to be on a hardworking new executive to continue our association's mandate to nourish the literary community through the teaching and sharing of skills.

"Story is a vessel for carrying meaning. It is the currency of human interchange, the net we cast to capture fugitive truths and the darting rabbits of emotion," wrote Daniel Taylor in his book *Tell Me a Story: The Life-Shaping Power of Our Stories*.

I think he's right. Fiction gives us a safe way to explore, and possibly come to terms with, the complexity of our agathokakological existence, an existence that consists of both good and evil. Our motives, our dreams, our fears, and our passions reflect our species' odd ability to both write poetry *and* create wars.

As Steven James, author of over thirty best-selling novels, says, "Fiction rips the masks away and allows people to see the stunning, breath-taking, heart-rending realities of life." I would add to this another quote, from author and essayist Aleksandar Hemon, who said, "In Bosnian, there's no distinction in literature between fiction and nonfiction; there's no word describing it."

Passion and truth are the foundations of writing, and I'm looking forward to a literary season immersed in both.

I am pleased to announce that we have exciting guest speakers coming up!

For October, we have two established authors sharing the stage for our in-person meeting. Rhea Rose and Linda Demeulemeester will lead a discussion and answer your questions on speculative fiction. Come and find out about the future of this extremely popular genre!

For later this fall, I am in the process of confirming two dynamite creators: Film producer and screenwriter Karen Lam, and international agent and author Rena Rossner. Stay tuned!

After our customary break in December, we return in January with novelist Jasmin Kaur. Her recent book has been lauded as a "stunning and breathtaking multigenerational Punjabi story" about a mother who must navigate the perils of living undocumented.

Besides our monthly guest speaker series, don't forget to participate in Dare-to-Be-Heard (first Monday of the month) and our Saturday Morning Write-ins (second Saturday of the month). Both will proceed via Zoom.

This season, I invite you to re-commit to your writing, tackle something new, and see where your story takes you!

A Note from the Editor



(photo: Kerstin Wrba_Unsplash)

This year, it feels like we bypassed fall and headed straight into winter. While my garden is still full of summer weeds, pumpkins have started showing up.

It's not just a physical thing. I'm not alone in feeling like time is playing tricks lately. Over the past year and more, our sense of time has been disrupted. Even as the months pass, we are experiencing a peculiar suspension of time. I've learned that this is a common experience, as we muddle our way to a new way of life, habituating to a hybrid world of in-person and online experiences, telescoping back to the before times and also showing up onscreen for virtual events. It's making the tracking of time and space challenging.

A touchstone of stability for me has been words – in books, in my own writing, and in community with other writers. Words help to locate us, elevate us, pinpoint anxieties to help us bridge to new possibilities. Words have a way of nourishing us.

This newsletter holds fresh news and writing from many of you. I am inspired by how creative and productive writers can be during these strange times. As ever, I welcome your writing news, short prose, and poetry to be included in our newsletter. In particular, I invite new members to share their writing.

Stay calm and write on,
Wiley Wei-Chiun Ho
Editor, NSWA Newsletter

Next newsletter submission deadline: Dec 15

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Newsletter Submission Guidelines

1. Submissions from NSWA members only.
2. Share your latest writing news (e.g., recent publications, book launches, author readings).
3. Poetry, short fiction or nonfiction up to 600 words. No op/ed articles.
4. Email your submission to editor@nswriters.org (preferred method), or mail to NSWA, PO Box 37549 Lonsdale East, North Vancouver, BC V7M 3L3.
5. Contributors are responsible for the accuracy, originality, and reliability of their content. Please check spelling, grammar and punctuation prior to submission. Word attachments preferred over email text. Accompanying photos belonging to the writer or open-source welcome.
6. Writing that appears in the NSWA newsletter is eligible for submission to the NSWA writing contest.
7. Publication in the *WRITE ON!* newsletter is at the discretion of the Editor, in consultation with the Board of Directors.

Disclaimer: Any views contained in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editor or the NSWA.

Upcoming Meetings and Guest Speakers!

October 18

**In-person meeting with
Guest Speakers
Rhea Rose and
Linda Demeulemeester**



Two acclaimed authors share the stage for our *in-person* October meeting!

Rhea Rose and Linda Demeulemeester will dive into speculative fiction and all its different forms, from poetry and anthologies to middle-grade spooky fantasies, and share their writing and editing tips.

Rhea Rose is an acclaimed poet, author, professional editor, and Indie publisher who recently produced *Stellar Evolution*, an anthology of speculative Canadian short stories and poems.

Linda Demeulemeester is the award-winning author of seven traditionally published speculative middle grade novels and a dozen+ short stories. Her bestselling *Grim Hill* series has been translated into French, Spanish, and Korean.

Bring your questions for this lively discussion with two seasoned industry pros! Don't miss this exciting evening!

**Upcoming Speaker
Rena Rossner**



Rena Rossner is both an author and a literary agent. She lives in Israel and is a graduate of the Johns Hopkins University's Writing Seminars program, Trinity College Dublin, and McGill University where she studied history.

Rena's poetry and short stories have been published, or are forthcoming from various print and online magazines. She has written for newspapers, worked in PR, grant-writing, website development, web-content editing, and in too many bookstores to count.

<https://renarossner.weebly.com/>

**Upcoming Speaker
Karen Lam**



Karen Lam has worked full-time in the film and television industry since 2000.

Starting her career as a producer and entertainment lawyer, Karen has since written and directed eight short films, two music videos, series directed a true-crime documentary series for Investigation Discovery (US), a web series "Mythos" (2015) created for TELUS, and three feature films -- "Stained" (2010), "Evangeline" (2013) and "The Curse of Willow Song" (2020), which premiered at the Vancouver International Film Festival in September 2020. The film won Best British Columbia Feature Film and Karen received a Best Director award at the British Columbia Leo Awards for her work.

Karen has also written television scripts for SYFY and Netflix on the series Van Helsing and Ghost Wars.

North Vancouver **City Library**

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 information on the latest resources and events, go to www.nvcl.ca

Saturday Morning Write-ins!



Writing doesn't always need to be a lonely activity. Why not write with other writers? Working together gives us energy and discipline that we can't get toiling at our desks alone. Grab a coffee and write together via Zoom.

NSWA members have discovered the joy of writing together. On the second Saturday morning of each month, a group of us meet on Zoom and write. It's informal and supportive. Members take turns hosting.

We start by saying hello to one another, complete a short warm-up exercise and then get down to working on our individual projects. There's a 5–10-minute break halfway through and a wrap-up at the end. Sharing of work is optional. You'd be surprised at how much writing you can do in a couple of hours.

Join us for our next session on October 9th, from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon!

Host: Joan Boxall

Zoom link – copy and paste into your web browser:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87105551221?pwd=WjM2UVA3V0ZFZ1RNNnovbXFVK01Sdz09>

Passcode: NSWA

(same each month)

Mark your calendars! Nov 13, break in December, Jan 8

Dare To Be Heard

Returns in October on the **First Monday** of each month!



If you're a writer and want to read your work to a non-critical audience, why not attend the next Dare to be Heard Literary Evening? Reading our writing out loud is very helpful for improving our work.

Dare welcomes all different genre writers at all stages of the writing journey and interested listeners, too. Dare provides an excellent and gentle space for writers to share poetry or prose – and support!

Dare to share!
Hear you there!

Mark your calendars!

Oct 4, Nov 1, Jan 10, Feb 7, March 7, April 4, May 2
Start time: 7:00 pm

Zoom link – copy and paste into your browser

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81570178724?pwd=OTVHY2tDQXVFeFZ4TFk3YVVIeU5nQT09>

Passcode: DARE
(same each month)

A word from Dare's New Host Rosemary Gretton:

I am looking forward to hosting Dare to be Heard this year. I write poetry and creative nonfiction, and am excited to welcome the work (and works in progress) of our members.

See you soon on Zoom!
Rosemary

Membership Renewal Time!

This is a general reminder that NSWA memberships run from September 1 through August 31.

The 2021-22 year has begun! Membership fees are now due. For just \$40, continue to be part of a caring and vibrant community of writers supporting other writers, and participate in various member-only events, including our speaker series, Dare to be Heard and Saturday Morning Write-ins. As well, members enjoy publication and publicity in our quarterly newsletters, and a discount to enter NSWA's annual writing contest.



The NSWA is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization. Based on anticipated revenue and expenses set out in the 2021-22 Budget, the membership fee for September 1, 2021, through August 31, 2022 is set at **\$40.00**.

Payment can be made through **Interac e-transfer** to **nswamembership@gmail.com**. Auto deposit has been set up to obviate the need for a security question and you should receive a virtual receipt confirming date, amount and completion. This is the preferred payment method. However, please be assured that payment can still be made by cheque posted to NSWA PO Box 37549, Lonsdale East, North Vancouver, BC V7M 3L3.

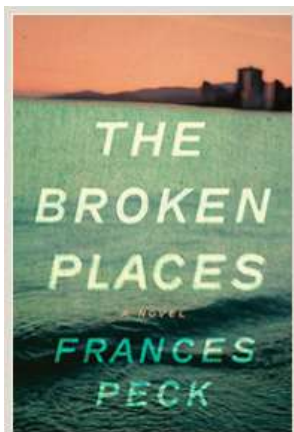
If you have already paid your membership fee for the 2021-22 year, thank you!

Should you have any questions about your membership status, please contact Membership Coordinator Carl Hunter by email: carlhunter@telus.net

BR AVO!

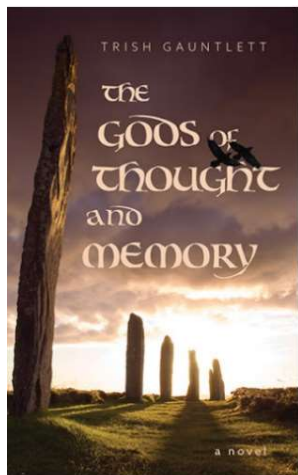
A warm welcome and congratulations to new member **Frances Peck** who is riding high on the news that her debut novel, **The Broken Places**, will be published by NeWest Press in April 2022 as part of the Nunatak First Fiction Series:

<https://newestpress.com/books/broken-places-the>. The



novel, about a major earthquake hitting Vancouver, examines the unpredictable ways in which catastrophe can shake up lives and reshape relationships. *The Broken Places* marks Frances's return to fiction after thirty years as a freelance writer, ghostwriter, editor and instructor. She's excited to plunge into the life of a published novelist and will share launch dates and other details as the release approaches.

www.francespeck.com



Trish Gauntlett is thrilled to be publishing her first novel, **The Gods of Thought and Memory**. Available in hardcover, softcover and e-book from <https://books.friesenpress.com/.../title/119734000181151823> and soon through online bookstores worldwide. Trish will keep us posted of her upcoming book launch this fall. Congratulations, Trish!

Congratulations to **Joyce Goodwin** for the inclusion of several of her poems in upcoming poetry anthologies **Love Lies Bleeding**, compiled by George Elliot Clarke, and **By the Wishing Tree (2022 TOPS)**, edited by Becky Alexander. Additionally, her first poetry collection

titled **Fragments: A Poetry Mosaic** is slated for publication by December 2021.

Kudos to **Linden Carroll** whose books **Olive** and **Full Circle** have been accepted as part of the North Shore Authors Collection for 2021-2022. Look for them at your local library. www.lindencarroll.com



Janine Cross and **Wiley Ho** are pleased to



have articles in the latest issue of **WordWorks**, 2021 Volume III.

To read a digital copy, visit

<https://www.bcwriters.ca/page-18154>.

Wiley's article "A Dozen Ways to Stay Calm and Keep Writing" appears on pp 12-13. Janine's article "Thorns,

Prickles, and Roses" appears on pp 14-15.

In September, **Wiley Ho** was honoured to have her full-length manuscript **Sticky Rice and Grilled Cheese** place First Runner Up for this year's **Jim Wong-Chu Emerging Writers Award**, presented by the Asian Canadian Writers Workshop.

A collective BRAVO to all you wordsmiths out there - sung and unsung. Write on!

100 WORD CHALLENGE

on the theme **Fall**

Fall Line: the route leading down any particular slope

Carmen G. Farrell

Halloween candy in grocery stores in late summer! We do not succumb to consumeristic cults! The natural downhill course from beaches and bathing suits - through eating our way through fall harvest comfort recipes - is to bulky sweaters and more holidays celebrated with food. By early October, we buy Halloween candy because the stores might run out. We open the box before the ghouls and goblins ring the doorbell because fall nights are long and boring. Trick or treaters are few and so the candy remains, calling us from the cupboard. In December, we settle into our hibernation weight.

Changing Seasons

Rod Baker

Wiggly winds tug off coats of brown,
tumble-spin dropping down.
Flakes of summer
carpet the ground.

A scrape of coldness in the air,
a brush of crimson in his hand,
the autumn artist stencils in
his changing palette on the land.

Bursts of colour, shorter days,
signals of the season's end.
Birds circling, flocking, heading south,
escaping winter's cooling trend.

And me I shuffle through the leaves
hands in pockets, collar up,
slowly changing like the land,
soon to sip at winter's cup.



(photo: Karsten Winegeart, Unsplash)

Fall

Melanie Hess

Tilted sun and vinegar wind
misty sky dancers with berry-stained beaks and cider breath
mice in moss nests mourn the dog days of summer

Our burnt caramel souls
coil in ruddy leaves, deep within their crunchy porous bones
I scavenge Elm Oysters
you weave a welcome mat of Cucurbita seeds
to sow inside of me
and emerge in spring

Next 100 Word Challenge: **morning, noon, and night**

- ✓ Strictly 100 words max (excluding title, if any).
- ✓ Hyphenated words, contractions and acronyms count as single words.
- ✓ Inclusion of theme word(s) optional.
- ✓ Fiction, non-fiction and poetry all welcome. Have fun with it!

*Submit your 100-word masterpiece to
editor@nswriters.org*

or by mail to NSW PO Box 37549 Lonsdale East, NV V7M 3L3

Deadline: December 15

Fiction

The Birth

Susan Lockhart

The moment of birth finally came. Alex looked on as his wife, Patricia pushed with all her might. The midwife was giving rapid fire coaching: “push, push, push!” during the contractions, then “pant, pant, pant!”, between them. The baby’s waxen head emerged. Alex became attentive for the first time since arriving at the hospital. He waited for the baby’s body to follow and reveal his son. But then, “It’s a girl!” the midwife trilled. “No, it *can’t* be!” Alex protested loudly in utter dismay. “It just *can’t* be!” he yelled again, more loudly this time as if he could invoke a gender change. He had tolerated this unwanted pregnancy by convincing himself and others that the baby was a boy. How could this be happening?

Once the cord was cut, the baby dried and handed to Patricia, the midwife called to Alex. “Come, Mr. McDougall, and meet your daughter”. Alex reluctantly approached. All he saw was an ugly bald headed garden gnome. “She’s a tiny one, she’ll need some good feeding!” cautioned the now jolly midwife. As he cast his eyes over the baby, all Alex could think was this baby was a girl and not the boy he had been expecting. “It” should have never been born, he declared to himself. He couldn’t bear to look at his wife who now was lying completely silent.

While the midwife tended to Patricia, Alex fumed. It wasn’t fair! He had been cheated of a son! Alex’s understanding of reproduction was limited. He was unaware his sperm determined the sex of his baby. As far as he was concerned, it was Patricia’s fault *absolutely*, without question. Yet another strike against his wife; there were so many. As soon as he could get her alone, she would experience the true extent of his wrath. The midwife mistook the look on Alex’s face as one of concern. “Mr. McDougall, your wife is fine and your baby too! Alex’s face now glowed red with anger. “*Shit!*” was all he could say. He rose up as if to strike the midwife, but instead, picked up a stack of magazines and threw them across the floor before storming out of the birthing room. The midwife stood in disbelief as Alex disappeared like a charging rhinoceros out of the room down the corridor. She never witnessed a scene like this in all her thirty years of midwifery. This joker was something else!

Alex continued his enraged exit down the corridor. His anger prevented him from noticing the questioning stares and muted comments of those he passed. He got in his car, declined to pay the bewildered parkade attendant and drove off with tires squealing toward the nearest pub. He avoided his usual watering hole. Anonymity suited him well at the moment. The only good thing that had happened to him today was it was still an hour until closing time. Ample time to drown his sorrows. After a sloppy parking job in the pub parking lot, Alex stepped out of the car. It was bitterly cold with what felt like gale force winds. The freezing rain that stung his face added to the insult of the day. Once in the door of the pub, he looked for the most isolated seat to plant himself. If fate had been kinder, he would be celebrating the birth of his son with cigars and a few drams of good scotch. Instead, he was sitting alone in the corner of a strange pub, cursing the universe.

Author’s note: This piece is an excerpt from a novel with the working title *Beyond the Mirror*, which Susan Lockhart is in the process of editing (again). The story takes place in a Glasgow hospital. “The Birth” is an event at the beginning of the novel which shapes the future of the main character, the baby born to Alex.

Non-fiction

A Special Place

Irene Nevill

I love books. Always have done. Even before I could read. Big books, little books, pizza-shaped books (I have one in my collection!), pop-up books, dog-eared books; books with awesome covers; books with pictures; books with glossy pages, waiting to be turned; storybooks, puzzle books; noisy books; books about all sorts of interesting things. All vying for my attention. Books to “own” for a short time before exchanging them for others.

And where were these treasures to be found? In the library, of course, or the “book house,” as I called it, until I could pronounce “library.” It was a special place for me during my formative years and I was proud as anything when I received the coveted tickets that admitted me to this Aladdin’s cave of goodies. The library was only a short walk from my house, and I was a frequent, most valued visitor. I was over the moon when, as a special treat, they allowed me to stamp my books out!



Books became my best friends, my mentors, my travelling companions on this incredible journey called “life.” Books helped me with my homework and my studies. I loved books so much I eventually became a librarian, a choice of career I never regretted. I am retired now but my lifelong love of books is unwavering. One day I will write one of my own and maybe it will grace the shelves of my “special place.”

Imagine a world without books...

Long live the library!

(I inherited my love of books and writing from my father, bless him, and I will always be grateful to him for that.)



No Footprint in the Sand

Linden Carroll

The news reports were high profile. Running shoes were floating ashore and horror of horrors, still occupied by human feet. Since 2007 there had been 15 or so reports of such shoes being found off British Columbia's west coast—most of which had been traced back to their previous owners, but not all. Rumours ran rampant of foul play, serial killing, accidental—an endless mélange of possibilities, but there was no denying the unusually high number of occurrences along the coast. The latest sighting off the west coast had been in 2018.

The ocean was dark and ominous. A heavy mist hung low, teasing the surface of the motionless water. It was a "Vincent Price" morning. One to rival even the most chilling of the movie producer's openings—guaranteed to have tantalised his imagination, had he been present on that rocky shoreline.

She walked briskly to keep the damp from penetrating her bones—her canine companion trotting ahead. They moved along the beach wall and dropped down to the bay. He followed his own agenda as all northern dogs will do—always searching out adventure to feed an insatiable appetite for trouble. As a non-swimmer, he enjoyed paddling and wading in his search, scouring rocks and pools for shellfish to crack and eat. A favourite game was tossing miniature crabs in her direction. His delight in her never-failing squeals of revulsion would have been quite amusing under other circumstances.

There were not many people moving about that morning—not surprising as it was not the best day for a walk. She gazed out across the menacing water. Suddenly stilled, her eyes settled on something gently bobbing on the surface. The water was ostensibly calm, nevertheless, undercurrents drew the object closer, albeit slowly, and on a direct course towards them. Through the mist it jogged until she could see it clearly. It was a running shoe. *Oh God! Please God, don't let him see it*, she thought frantically casting around for the dog, willing him not to pick up on it, which of course, he did. The glee in his eyes was apparent as he waded out, paused and waited for his prize to come within reach.

A small crowd began to gather above them on the sea wall. Excitement climbed to monumental heights, as more people joined the group, some reaching for cameras—all avidly watching the drama unfold.

She called to the dog, knowing he would not be swayed, not even with the promise of treats. The looky-loos stood mesmerised, consumed with morbid fascination—obviously they had been following the news reports.

The shoe was now within range. Seizing his chance, the dog grabbed it. Her appeals fell on barren ground as she pursued him—the crowd following along. Suddenly growing tired of the game, he allowed her to reach him. "Drop it immediately," she shrieked. Miraculously, he did, hastily moving out of her reach, a cheeky grin spread across his face. *Amazing how dogs can smile*, she thought fleetingly as the gruesome task of investigating the inside of the shoe followed. The crowd were, by this time, almost beside themselves, their anticipation proving too much to handle—although, not enough to bring them down the steps to assist.

Bracing herself, she gazed down into the shoe. It was devoid of human parts. Relief coursed through her trembling body as gazing up at the onlookers she gave them the thumbs up sign. In full accord, everyone laughed—if not a little sheepishly and gradually dispersed. It was a thought-provoking morning, one with NO FOOTPRINT IN THE SAND.

Poetry

Rings of Sorrow **Joyce Goodwin**

let's hug a tree
let our pain spin
in rings of wood.
inward spiral
self unravelling
now hug me,
a sorrow ringed tree.



The Echo of a Song **Trish Gauntlett**

Across a million years and more
I hear the echo of a song.
A song of searing, rolling deserts, heat and dust, of sharpened stones and spears
and the slow, earth-rolling shift to green and rain.
A woman lifts her eyes and looks far and away,
imagining a strange new world beyond the known horizon
and they begin.

Across a span of 20,000 years and more
I hear the echo of a song.
A song of snow and ice, of endless journeys, losses, strange new worlds, footsteps, fires, forests, fangs.
First people trace a bridge of ice from west to east
and they begin.

Now, from the heart of cities, concrete and clouds, roads and rails, stress and solitude
I hear the echo of a song.
A song of loneliness, a song of love, a song of life and death, escape and reckoning,
a song to slip through blocks and barriers
and slide straight to our souls,
tracing a line of music back to the beginning,
back to the first,
back to the ancestors,
one pure straight line of song, unbroken.

We sail on these bright notes, as they did, into a world we cannot see,
sending all we are and all we know into the void
so those who follow us will listen to the wind
and hear the echo of our song.

'Heh Leaf!'
Joan Boxall

(Inspired by Johnny Mercer's lyrics/song 'Autumn Leaves' © 1947)

Heh Leaf! Fall out with me
in one fell swoop—
let this be your downfall.

Fall in line
Fall apart, f(or) all I care.
Fall into, fall off of, fall on hard lines (in your
case, veins)

Fall out of something (with someone/something)
Fall prey, fall flat.
It's as easy as falling

between the (wise)cracks.
Fall over laughing on your midrib—
divided (we fall).

And that leaves us, Leaf,
as the 'fallen ones'—
September through November.



For an in-depth and interesting exploration of the song, its musical origins and influences, and the etymology of the word "fall," Joan's blog at www.joanboxall.com.

Joan Boxall is author of articles in *Inspired 55+ Lifestyle Magazine* <https://www.seniorlivingmag.com/joan-boxall/> as well as the crucially acclaimed memoir *DrawBridge, Drawing Alongside My Brother's Schizophrenia*, published in 2019 by Caitlin Press <https://caitlin-press.com/our-books/drawbridge/>



NSWA Summer Wrap-up at John Lawson Park, June 21

2021 Festival: October 18–24

Sign Up to Volunteer at the Vancouver Writers Fest

Volunteers are still needed for Sunday Production and Afternoon Tea set-up and strike shifts, as Bartenders for Friday & Saturday evening events at Performance Works, for Raffle Ticket Sales, and on our Box Office teams at event venues. Also in the Festival House kitchen, as Floaters, and as Hosts in our Volunteer Lounge, for pre-Fest Production set-up crew, and Festival Ambassadors. For more information about volunteer jobs, benefits, and a link to register online, visit: <https://writersfest.bc.ca/volunteer-information>

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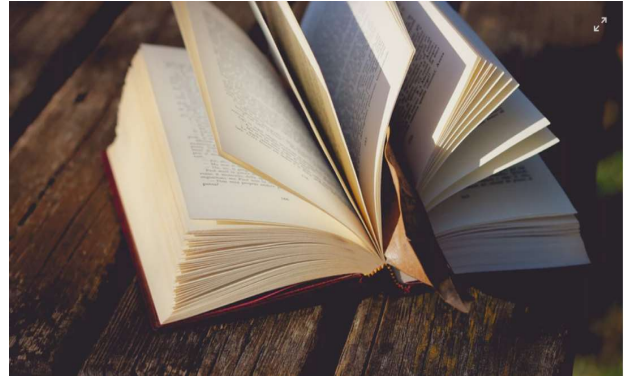
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***Warm thanks to all NSWA volunteers
for their dedication and hard work!***



(photo: Ergita Sela, Unsplash)

*“If other people are to care about
your life, art must intervene.”*

– Hilary Mantel

Events Calendar

Oct 4, 7pm Dare to be Heard

Oct 9, 10am Saturday Morning Write-in

***Oct 18, 7pm In-person meeting with guest
speakers Rhea Rose and Linda
Demeulemeester***

Nov 1, 7pm Dare to be Heard

Nov 13, 10am Saturday Morning Write-in

Nov 15, 7pm Guest Speaker

December Winter break

Dec 15 Newsletter submission deadline

Jan 10, 7pm Dare to be Heard

Jan 8, 10am Saturday morning Write-in

Jan 17, 7pm Guest speaker Jasmin Kauer

The Last Page

Cathy L. Scrimshaw

I love autumn.

It's the season of gorgeous colours, cool temperatures, stunning and ever-changing cloud formations, sweater weather (who doesn't love sweaters in all their variations?). Most of all, it's my favourite season for walking. Not just ordinary walking, but walking with my dog. It can be one of the most social and inspiring times of my day. That's all because of Glee, my collie. Glee is technically a rescue, but not the usual kind. She's never been abused or abandoned.

Truth is, Glee is a failed beauty queen. Her breeder wanted to put her in the show ring, but quickly discovered Glee has little patience with strutting for an audience and posing for the judges. So instead, wee Glee spent her first four years living the life of a movie Lassie, running free on a huge piece of property with six other collies and sleeping in an outdoor kennel. But then it came time for her to move on to her own home, and so she came to us, through the collie rescue group.

She adapted quickly.

It took her about two minutes to discover she much preferred the couch to a kennel. It also didn't take her long to realize that walking around the neighbourhood or in the trails on a leash was okay, too, and that there are lots of potential friends, both animals and people,

everywhere she goes. The great part about that last discovery is that because she's so friendly, so enthusiastic about everyone and everything around her, people are drawn to her like the proverbial moth to a flame.

Which is great for me both personally and as inspiration for my writing. I've met, and gotten to know, the most interesting personalities.

There's Carrot, the orange poodle, whose owner is a retired insurance investigator, with an elderly father who worked as a police forensic specialist. Carrot's owner loves company while she walks, and is a gold mine of information about all things investigative – perfect for someone like me who loves to read and write mysteries.

Bandit, who looks like an oversized pit bull but is in reality a gentle giant, belongs to a woman down the street who owns an all-female construction firm. They specialize in high-end renovations. On our walks with Bandit and his human, I've learned a lot about client quirks and demands, not to mention how tricky certain design elements can be to build into an older home.

Then there's Lila the young terrier and her elderly companions, long-term North Shore residents who came from Denmark. Both mentally sharp, physically fit, adventurous and a joy to talk to, they've filled me in on lots of recent history, including environmental protests they've taken part in. If I ever

make an 84-year-old woman a protagonist in a mystery novel, I'm going to base the character on the female half of that couple.

I could go on. Dozens of different people have stopped to meet Glee during our walks and gone on to become casual friends. The presence of Glee, and their dogs too, seems to encourage conversations that start with the weather then turn into wide-ranging discussions and confidences – rich veins of lived experiences that can be mined to create believable, complex characters.

Those walks are everything a writer needs for inspiration and personal contentment. They are everything a dog needs for a great day, and then a good sleep at night.



Happy autumn, everyone!