

WRITE

THE MAGAZINE OF
**THE WRITERS'
UNION OF
CANADA**

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SUMMER 2014

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A writer friend told me a while back that at least once in their career, all writers should take a year off and do something else, something completely different from cobbling together sentences. In his case, he built a barn. Though my father was a carpenter and cabinet maker, I am, alas, hopelessly ham-fisted. My year off from writing — that is the kind of writing I have been doing for the last four decades — has now officially begun in my office as Chair of your Union. Or that is what past Chairs told me: “Forget about your own writing for this time of service to the writing community.”

But the business of writing will be my constant concern and it is the reason that I eventually agreed to let my name stand for this position. And it is the reason in the first place that I joined The Writers’ Union of Canada two decades ago. TWUC, it appeared, was where I belonged because it was the organization seemingly most active in advocating for the bread-and-butter issues that are the concern of all writers, regardless of genre. That advocacy was particularly relevant to me because I had embarked by circumstance and desire on a career as a full-time writer.

As I told our members who attended the recent AGM in St. John’s, Newfoundland, I come to the Chair with a commitment to help what I see as the most vulnerable portion of our membership, full-time writers. Even if one does not write full-time, whatever is done for the full-time writer will enable all members to dedicate more time to their craft and give everyone greater freedom of choice.

TWUC has always been about livelihood and freedoms, and a fundamental freedom is to be well enough paid to practice your craft.

With the sea-change — or perhaps tsunami is more accurate — taking place in the writing and publishing world, the work of TWUC is more vital than ever. It is particularly important, I would argue, for younger writers. TWUC’s future and the future of the next generation of writers in this country will be inextricably linked.

TWUC was instrumental in the creation of Public Lending Rights (PLR) and what became Access Copyright. The income for the holdings of our books in libraries and the copying of our work created an income stream for writers, members and non-members alike, which did not exist before. These are foundational programs and the annual pay-outs constitute the only professional pension a full time writer now has — as I well know. TWUC continues to be fully engaged in protecting and improving these vital sources of income security.

Hard as it has been for my generation to make a living as a writer, I believe it is even more difficult today, when writers are increasingly being asked to do more for less. TWUC’s success will depend upon its ability to meet the economic challenges writers face going forward.

We are in fact already working on these opening fronts. This year we put in place the Curriculum Task Force, with representation from every province (and territories to come, we hope) to develop a national strategy to increase Canadian content — our homegrown literature — at all levels of the education system. This initiative answers a longstanding priority of the membership, and in its philosophy returns to the very roots of TWUC’s reason for being. In parallel, we are continuing to engage with the educational system, the courts, the classroom, and government boardrooms, over its interpretation of “fair dealing” under the new copyright act.

A motion was approved at the AGM to explore means of creating a collective pension fund for writers, for which there is already a precedent in other fields of the arts. Following on a report commissioned by TWUC in 2012, “Favourable Income and Tax Legislation for Writers,” we will be dedicating considerable energy on this file running up to the federal election in 2015.

An important undertaking in the year ahead will be the drafting of a new three-year Strategic Plan, 2014-2017. This process began at the AGM with a break-out session, which was well attended, and will form the basis for a workshop in the fall for National Council to consider the where, what, and how of the Union’s future. We will also continue to look to you, the members, for ideas of what the Union can do to make your writing life not only possible but better.

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Canada Council
for the Arts
Conseil des Arts
du Canada

We acknowledge the support of the Ontario Arts Council (OAC), an agency of the Government of Ontario, which last year funded 1,681 individual artists in 216 communities across Ontario for a total of \$52.8 million.



50 YEARS OF ONTARIO GOVERNMENT SUPPORT OF THE ARTS
50 ANS DE SOUTIEN DU GOUVERNEMENT DE L'ONTARIO AUX ARTS

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The World Cup of Cultural Protectionism:



CANADA vs NORWAY





BY JAMES GRAINGER

Oh, to be a writer in Norway.

One of the top ten exporters of oil and natural gas, the Nordic economic powerhouse (the country has no debt) has channeled those earnings back into its national infrastructure and social and cultural services. The government provides guaranteed incomes for “renowned” and established artists equal to the lowest level of the state’s salary scale, which, given the high salaries of Norwegian workers, is no pittance. There are also substantial grants and

stipends, which can run up to three consecutive years, to help younger writers and artists establish themselves.

So how does Canada stack up against its fellow Northern petro giant when it comes to nurturing its resident artists? As the chart below illustrates, not so well. Canadian writers may receive more assistance and cultural protection than their American counterparts, but compared to Norway, our country is still setting the bar very low, especially considering our energy revenues.

	 CANADA	 NORWAY
POPULATION	35 million	5 million
LAND MASS	10 million square km	400 thousand square km
ANNUAL GOVERNMENT OIL & GAS REVENUES	\$26 billion (2012)	\$40 billion
NATIONAL SOVEREIGN WEALTH FUND (from energy sector)	\$0	\$850 billion
LITERACY RATE:	97% (likely lower)	100 %
TOTAL FEDERAL GRANTS TO WRITERS AND PUBLISHERS	\$24.5 million (2009)	\$127 million (including libraries)
TOTAL PUBLIC LENDING RIGHTS PAID	\$9.7 million (2008)	\$13+ million (2006)
DEEP DISCOUNTING OF NEW BOOKS	Indigo and Amazon, both deep discounters, control at least 75% of the retail book market.	Almost none, as the country’s leading bookstore chains are owned by Norwegian publishers and are protected by many competition laws.
SALES OF NATIONAL BOOKS TO LIBRARIES	Book purchases are decided by local public library systems. The materials selection policy for the Toronto Public Library System (the biggest in Canada) states: “Special consideration is given to materials with Canadian content, that record the Canadian experience or that relate to life in Canada or the lives and works of Canadians.”	Guaranteed purchase of 1,000 copies of all adult titles, 1,550 of children’s (on top of individual library’s acquisition budgets).
NATIONAL TAX ON BOOKS	5% GST	0%

Note: These figures may be offset in Quebec, where Bill 51 protects and supports Quebec publishers, bookstores and distributors of French language books.

SOURCES:

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117337/norway-best-place-world-be-writer>
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<http://canadacouncil.ca/~media/files/research%20-%20en/2012-13%20provincial%20profiles/national%20overview-en.pdf>

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TECHNOLOGY /

From Book to App: A Mystery Benefactor Turns a Book Interactive

BY LEANNE JONES



With writers experimenting with every kind of publishing model right now, this seemed like a good time for me to describe my firsthand experience of having my book transformed into an iBook app for the iPad.

Before I get into the details, I want to stress that for this to succeed your story needs the potential of general appeal, something with universality or a story important for the understanding of a larger subject: such as, “where did the Internet come from?”

The origins of the Internet was the subject of my book *It’s Cool to be Clever*, a print book which then became the first iBook published in Canada. The book and app were written for middle school children, but also as a stealth book for adults. It is the story of Edson C. Hendricks, the genius who invented the design that was adopted for the Internet as we know it today. It is the true story of an inquisitive boy in the 1950s who doesn’t fit in at school. Edson is bullied because he is very smart and has red hair. People accuse him of getting good grades by getting test answers from his father, the school principal. He copes by finding comfort in an imaginary world where he has machine parts instead of internal organs or emotions. Years later Edson’s strange capacity to think like a machine helps him create a new way for people to communicate using computers.

How was this story found? One might say it was a story just ready to be told, and it finally was told because a friend in New York introduced Edson to me online. Then being a detective, as writers often are, I tracked the tale down with great interest for a period of more than two years. With patience, using a bit of psychology,

I listened as the story came out. It was a large story that had to be written in simple way. It also had to be beautifully portrayed, which is where the talented illustrator Anna Mah came in.

In the case of Edson’s story there was an opportunity to speak to many brilliant men and women associated with MIT where Edson attended college. Finally feeling in his true element, he managed to achieve the Dean’s list every year. Interviewed also were old friends and colleagues from IBM’s Cambridge Scientific Center, under the management of Norman Rasmussen. It was learned that Mr. Rasmussen believed in shielding his researchers from the corporate management, thus creating a climate of isolation conducive for inventing.

So I had a great story. In fact, I had too much story. The book had been prepared for publishing as a hardcover edition. Through the course of editing and researching the story for accuracy, extra material, far more than could be put into a book, was amassed. The publisher, Bruce Batchelor at Agio Publishing House, began to look at the possibility of creating a tablet application. An app can include almost unlimited amounts of background material.

Edson got enthused, and helped by finding photos from his family archives and providing more historical documentation from when he worked for the IBM Cambridge Scientific Center in the 1970s. He also provided papers on several other original scientific contributions not connected with computers. He agreed to videotaped interviews and narration of the story. It was fortuitous that he had prior stage training and had a magnificent voice.

But how to make it into an app? First off, there’s the issue of cost. A fully featured, multi-functional story/learning tool costs tens of thousands of dollars to produce. The majority of that cost is to pay for directing and creating the “assets,” such as

illustrations, animations, narration, musical score, sound effects/ design, video and audio interviews, or learning tools. For example, since Edson had been bullied in school, resources for parents and children on bullying were included.

The cost was daunting, but then we got lucky. The publisher was approached by a silent investor who did not want his name disclosed. This resulted in a magical effect since no one worried about money and many who had hoped Edson's story would be told were pleased when it was. From the author's point of view, it was refreshingly freeing not to have to consider money.

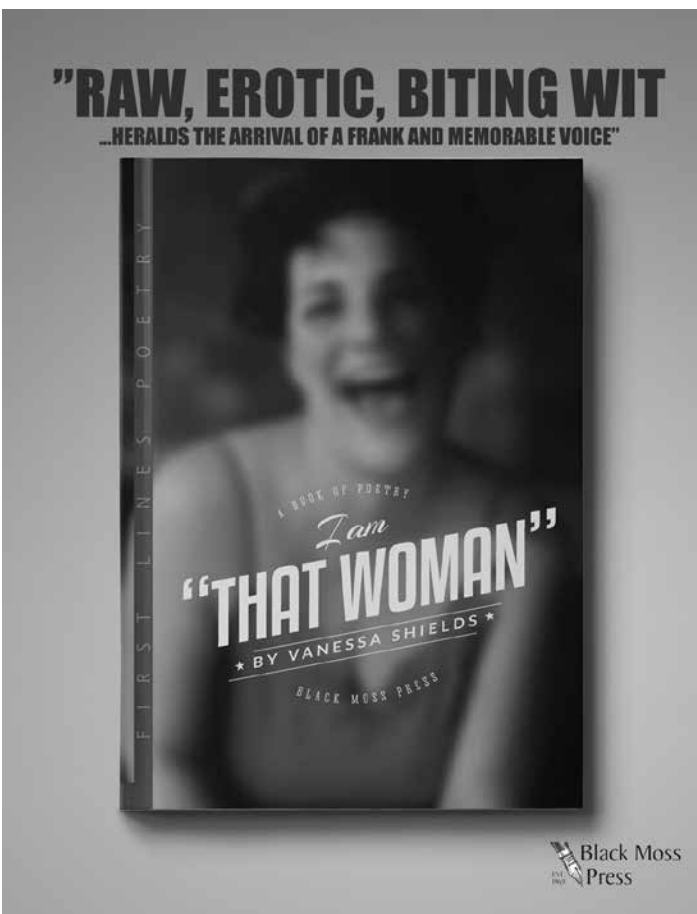
The "It's Cool to be Clever" app was produced by a team working under the direction of Bruce Batchelor at Agio Studios. Marsha Batchelor was designer, Ian Jones was sound engineer, and Anna Mah created the illustrations, except for two created by Athea Boyes. Jim Roepcke was the software developer, Leanne Jones wrote the story and composed and played the original musical score. Dan Batchelor was videographer, and Edson Hendricks narrated.

The book *It's Cool to be Clever* was produced in the Spring of 2011 and the app of the book was released just before Christmas of the same year. Immediately it garnered high ratings and

enthusiastic reviews by parents and journalists. It had more than 10,000 downloads in 78 countries all over the world within a short time. Off and on, it was offered as a free app, allowing schools to acquire copies for all their student iPads. As of yet, it has not had any bad reviews. Book sales also increased gradually after the app was out. But the app received a much wider distribution that is still ongoing.

This mystery investor therefore made something that may never have seen the light of day, come out into the light for the enjoyment of many. This was the magic and mystery of "It's Cool To Be Clever." Some say they still think of the Internet as wizardry. Well, then perhaps Edson was a wizard. The author, seeing the story come alive, helped her realize the talents of the Agio team who she greatly appreciated for their innovation. In this fast changing world of digitalization, when books have the possibility to be enhanced this way, from book to app becomes a new opportunity writers have for further adventure and challenge.

Leanne Jones is a longstanding member of The Writers' Union and a private investigator in Victoria, BC.



THE WALLACE STEGNER GRANT FOR THE ARTS

This grant consists of \$500 and one month free residency in the Wallace Stegner House in Eastend, Saskatchewan.

Applicants must be published Canadian writers able to spend the month of October in the Wallace Stegner House. Please visit our website at www.stegnerhouse.ca for more details about the Grant.

Applications should be sent by **March 15** to:

The Eastend Arts Council,
Bursary Committee,
Box 415
Eastend, SK S0N 0T0



This grant is made possible by the generosity of the W. Garfield Weston Foundation and the Saskatchewan Arts Board.



WATTPAD:

Engaging Readers as You Write

BY MARY W. WALTERS

Sometimes I have trouble writing the next pages of a work in progress. It's not that I am short of ideas. It's just that I have a lot of other urgent matters that require my attention (paid editing work, posting to Facebook, reading books, visiting family and friends, checking out the latest Rob Ford antics... the list goes on).

I have often envied those writers with editors and literary agents standing at their sides like midwives, encouraging them through their labour, reminding them of the rewards of manuscript delivery, telling them how much the world wants to see their next baby, and finally urging them to “push.”

When I heard about Wattpad, an Internet platform for readers and writers that attracts 27 million unique visitors per month, and 200,000 uploads of writing per day, I thought it might be part of the answer to my problem. And it has been. But it is also other things.

For the benefit of others who might be considering their own forays into Wattpad, I hereby share what my activity there has taught me.

MAKING WATTPAD WORK

The important part of making Wattpad work for you is to remember that it is a social media platform. If you don't engage with it (read others' works, respond to comments, participate in forum discussions), you will miss out on the very important reciprocity factor, and your work will languish. Further, thanks to algorithms, the more readers you attract, the more readers will find you on their own.

For me, Wattpad has become part of an overall marketing strategy for my fiction which boils down to infiltrating as much of the Internet as I can. My goal is to attract attention to *Seeds and Secrets* — the novel I am creating on the platform, which I will eventually pull down, revise, have professionally edited and bring to market — and to entice readers to seek out other,

For me, Wattpad serves in a small way the same marketing role that YouTube does for musicians.

already published works of mine that they can buy right now. For me, Wattpad serves in a small way the same marketing role that YouTube does for musicians.

Once the piece is up there, the effort to attract readers begins. You can contribute to this process (but probably only once) by emailing all of your friends and inviting them to check your story out, and by posting your Wattpad link to other social media sites. Of course, you also want to encourage visitors to your page whom you don't already know, and you can do this indirectly by reading and commenting on the writing of others on the site, getting involved in the discussion forums, and entering the informal competitions Wattpad puts on from time to time. The goal is to get people to "follow" you so that they will be notified whenever you post a new installment or an update.

Every time someone takes a look at a segment you have posted, your "read" counter goes up. Readers can also vote for or post a comment on your work. The more reads and votes you get, the greater are your chances of being noticed by even more readers.

While the Wattpad platform supports lots of dabblers and thousands of very bad writers, networking there is not as painful as you might think. There are some really good writers there, clearly intending to do as I am — get the work written and simultaneously noticed by intelligent and discerning readers — and there are some new writers with lots of promise whom I'm delighted to encourage. I've found a few manuscripts on Wattpad whose next installments I am genuinely eager to read — some quite literary, some strong genre fiction: historical, detective, sci fi, pirate adventure, you name it. When I find a piece I like, I check out the author's comments on other fiction and on forums, and that often leads me to other people whose work I want to read.

When I'm reading others' manuscripts, I always try to leave at least one positive comment that is specific to the work — unless it is awful, in which case I say nothing. Sometimes I point out an inconsistency I've noticed (character, motivation, chronology, etc.) but mainly I just say something brief but encouraging that's intended to keep the writer going. I assume that their stories are, like mine, in draft format and that changes will be made as they

get farther into the draft. (Also, I edit for a living and my standards are ridiculously high: some of my questions could derail the work. I don't like to get into it too deeply unless I'm asked.)

I've also found a few very careful and helpful readers on Wattpad who will probably help me get through *Seeds and Secrets* far more quickly than I would ever have done on my own. *Seeds and Secrets* is the story of a 47-year-old seed researcher who, attempting to keep her ancient Lhasa Apso alive after its sibling expires of old age, inadvertently discovers a formula that makes the dog start getting younger. She starts taking it herself, and soon all the relationships in her life are screwed up. Like most of my fiction, *Seeds and Secrets* explores a serious subject by means of a commercially palatable plot. I love it when readers not only get the surface story, but appreciate the underlying themes and also recognize my passion for wordplay and sentence structure. I've found readers like that on Wattpad. Plus, there is a definite motivation to keep going when people start asking when you're going to post the next installment.

It is also important to keep contributing work to Wattpad in order to retain your readers' interest. My goal (sometimes interrupted by life) is to post at least half a chapter every week, and to comment on a couple of other people's work every two or three days.

For me, Wattpad is like a humungous writing group where no one has to make coffee or serve beer, I don't need to get dressed before offering feedback on other writers' work, and I don't have to pay attention to comments from readers who don't get what I'm doing.

Wattpad is not for everyone, of course, but if it sounds like a tool you could use to stimulate your writing and find new readers for your existing work, check it out. I'll be happy to read the writing that you post — as long as you read mine.

Mary W. Walters has published five books of fiction, most recently the novels Rita Just Wants to Get Thin and The Adventures of Don Valiente and the Apache Canyon Kid (co-authored with John A. Aragon).

WATTPAD: QUICK FACTS

BY MARY W. WALTERS

WHAT IT IS

Wattpad (www.wattpad.com) is a social storytelling platform where writers can register to post all kinds of work — poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction — and where readers can read that work, all at no charge.

Most writers post short segments of their works-in-progress (1,000 to 2,000 words at a time, sometimes much less, sometimes much more), adding to it at regular (or irregular) intervals. Some writers are posting whole manuscripts in serial format that they have previously completed.

Some people use Wattpad as an end in itself — they are not interested in publishing elsewhere. Others are creating works ultimately intended for self- or traditional publication. Many writers have several projects on the go on Wattpad. Some ask for input and guidance from their readers: others just write.

WHO'S ON WATTPAD?

The two Canadians who developed Wattpad (Allen Lau and Ivan Yuen) intended it for readers as much as writers, and Ashleigh Gardner, Head of Content, says that “90 per cent of Wattpad visitors are there to read and comment, not to post stories.”

She also says that regular visitors include publishers and agents who are looking for new talent.

“Some writers use Wattpad to promote their books to publishers,” she says. “Perhaps their novel was rejected when they submitted it directly, but now they can demonstrate that there is significant interest in their work.”

Gardner also tells me that the Wattpad app for smartphones and tablets is downloaded about 400,000 times a day. “85 per cent of our visitors now reach us from mobile devices,” she says.

The advantage of Wattpad’s mobility component is clear: your work is accessible to readers no matter where they are, and your followers will receive “push” notifications whenever you post something new.

Wattpad has had a reputation for being a place where teens post stories for one another, but if that were true at one point (and wouldn’t it be great to know that there are millions of teens who are interested in writing and reading?), the demographics are changing. “The majority of visitors are now between the ages of 18 and 30,” Gardner says, “and the subject matter of the content is changing as the average age goes up.”

COPYRIGHT AND OTHER CONCERNS

Gardner says that the site features a very sophisticated data-checking system that not only protects what is posted, but also works to prevent piracy. “All work on Wattpad of course remains copyright to the author,” she says. “Further, it cannot be copied and pasted, and readers can’t download it.”

A few people have told me they’re reluctant to sign on to Wattpad because they fear it will lead to spam, but so far Wattpad has attracted no more spam to me than have Twitter, LinkedIn, Goodreads, or Facebook (which is, in my case, none).



Alistair MacLeod

BY DOUGLAS GIBSON

1936 – 2014

At the 2014 Annual General Meeting of The Writers' Union of Canada in St. John's, Newfoundland, at the formal banquet on May 31, Doug Gibson was asked to deliver a toast to Alistair MacLeod. He followed eloquent tributes to Heather Robertson (by Erna Paris), and to Farley Mowat (by Silver Donald Cameron).

Here is what he said.

"This is a great honour.

Mavis Gallant... Heather Robertson... Farley Mowat... Alistair MacLeod. It has been a hard campaign, and we have had our losses. After Alistair's death John Vaillant wrote to me from B.C. saying that as a writer he felt like a sailor alone at sea who was finding all of his guiding lighthouses winking out, one by one.

At the age of 77 Alistair MacLeod died as the sun rose on Easter Sunday. This was in the Windsor hospital where he had lain since a hard stroke had felled him in January — something the MacLeod family had carefully kept private.

As an old friend (and Alistair and I last appeared together in public in November at the Harbourfront Tribute to Alice Munro — you could always count on Alistair's generous help at such events) I was in constant touch with Alistair and Anita, so I knew about his stroke. In fact, at the end of February, Jane and I were able to visit him in the hospital. Although the stroke had paralysed his right side, knocking out the right hand that had held the pen that set his stories free, and making speech very difficult for him, he had prepared to greet me with a joke. Had we, he wanted to know "been dancing at Scotsville recently?"

This was a reference to a summer visit to Cape Breton where Alistair and Anita had taken us square dancing in the Scotsville Fire Hall, and we had seen them happily whirling among their friends and neighbours, clearly part of the community. Yet as Alistair's fame spread around the world (for instance in Japanese translations of his books) his Cape Breton neighbours had found themselves directing Japanese pilgrims to Alistair's house, where he and his Japanese admirers, sharing no common language but their humanity, would solemnly exchange silent bows.

Most of Alistair's stories — and most of *No Great Mischief*, his only novel — were set in Cape Breton. But many of you here tonight will recall that the title story in his first collection, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*, is set right here in St. John's. It's a powerful story about a father and a son who will never know him. I made the mistake of reading it on the train down to Windsor for the first Visitation the day after his death, and I'm sure some passengers are still talking about the man with the beard who spent so much time in tears.

I heard that there were many tears at his funeral in Broad Cove, Cape Breton. In fact his cousin Kevin, a pall bearer, told me that he wept so copiously that a Cape Breton neighbour was highly impressed. "Kevin," she said, "when I die, I want you at my funeral."

Laughter and tears. As you know, Alistair's greatest pride was for his family... Anita and their six children and the grandchildren. After the Windsor Remembrance Service two weeks ago — attended by hundreds of people — his son Lewis recalled that it took twenty minutes each night to get Alistair out of his university office, as he exchanged greetings and jokes with friends and colleagues, even telling the janitor on a ladder changing light bulbs, "You are the light of my life!"

And this, of course, was the beloved writer whose death was mourned across Canada and around the world. *The New York Times*, for example, devoted half a page to a fine obituary — which unfortunately targeted a villainous publisher who travelled to Windsor to seize the manuscript of *No Great Mischief*. (And I should tell you that Heather Robertson was part of that story. That fateful day I met her at the Toronto airport and told her that I was off to Windsor to grab Alistair's manuscript. Heather was torn. Her natural instinct was to defend a writer against a bullying publisher — but what if the publisher was acting for the common good? Tough call. A year later Heather was part of the jury that unanimously awarded the Trillium Prize to *No Great Mischief*.)

And Alistair, as some of you may know, went on to describe my beneficent visit as "a home invasion". That is, when he was not employing what, after last night, we might call "The Vanderhaeghe Variation", where he claimed that for months he tried in vain to get Doug Gibson to read his novel.

And now he's gone. And no Author's Festival will ever be quite the same, because to be with Alistair was to be in touch with greatness disguised by modest, friendly decency. I was very glad when the Canadian Press picked up as a headline my description of Alistair as "a great writer, and a great man".

And yet... he's not really gone. Because as everyone in this room realizes — and as Heather and Farley certainly realized — writers have found a way to cheat death, to allow you to meet them long after their death. The work lives on. And what also lives on is the impact of lines like the unforgettable final words of *No Great Mischief*, "All of us are better when we're loved."

Douglas Gibson's book, Stories About Storytellers, has an affectionate chapter devoted to Alistair MacLeod. His next book, Across Canada By Story (Fall 2015) will also include stories about his beloved friend.