



WRITE

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CANADA**

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THE MONEY ISSUE

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What a fabulous AGM we had in Winnipeg, a gathering of writers in community, book-ended by two important press releases. The first, issued on the eve of our meeting, made the desperate and deteriorating financial state of writers clear for all to see — and the press took notice!



The second, issued just after the AGM and coinciding with the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, publicized a resolution, passed unanimously at the AGM plenary, that committed this Union to action in support of the challenge of reconciliation the commission issued.

More on both in a bit, but first I want to share more of the spirit that pervaded the AGM, one in which we partnered with the League of Canadian Poets. We each ran our own business plenaries, but we shared a number of other events, including fabulous, inspiring, and moving speeches by Gregory Scofield and Guy Gavriel Kay.

Instead of having many (boring?) hours of business plenary discussion, the organizers of this year's AGM stripped the more policy-oriented discussions away from the business session, freeing them to be more informal and participatory. And it worked, with the result that when people did go to the microphone, these were often people who had rarely spoken in a plenary before, and new, fresh perspectives were heard. There were excellent events focussed on the business end of writing, but a nice array of others focussed on the juicier side, associated with the process of creation, the existential challenges of being a writer, and building strong writing communities. They were also led by an engaging and diverse array of writers — such as Angie Abdou, Méira Cook, Farzana Doctor, Steve Locke, and Trish Salah.

I am dwelling on this not just to celebrate a great experience of writers coming together to share the magic and madness of what we do, but also to make a point: Next year is an AGM that everyone should plan to attend. It's being billed as a superconference, called the Canadian Writers' Summit, because it will bring a wide array of writers' organizations (even some international ones) together at the same time and place. Not only will it be a great party and a great schmooze-fest, it will be a huge opportunity to address common concerns as writers, and to forge common cause around what to do. So, please, mark the dates June 15-19, 2016, and start saving loonies and toonies to cover the cost. It will be worth it!

As Chair and in consultation with National Council and the office, I will continue to move us forward on a number of files in the months ahead. The financial one continues to be pressing, especially in light of the income survey that put writers on the "endangered species" list, particularly if they are women. Not only are writers making 27 per cent less today than in 1998, women are earning 55 per cent of what male writers do. This underscores the urgency of our efforts to restore fair compensation to writers for copying of our work through Access Copyright, and increasing funding for PLR, plus ensuring that any changes to funding

models continue to honour the equity principle of sustaining income for the most number of writers for the longest possible time.

I will also be supporting the important work of our task forces. The Curriculum Task Force will not only continue its work of identifying the priority areas for increasing the quantity and diversity of Canadian content in the K-12 curriculum, but will also act on the Union's commitment arising from the TRC, working in alliance with Aboriginal writers' organizations and others. The Diversity/Equity Task Force will continue to advise on how we can bring equity to our organizational practices, and to do important outreach work. A newly formed E-lending Task Force will identify issues we need to address in this burgeoning field. And a newly created Freedom of Expression committee will coordinate communication on freedom of expression issues as they arise, recommend potential action, and prepare relevant written materials to support the committee's work. Its members will include TWUC's liaisons with PEN Canada and other organizations focussed on this theme.

The regional reps continue to stretch their time and travel budgets to support writers in their home communities, including encouraging the formation of local 'pods' or other mechanisms through which TWUC members can be in touch and support each other. And I will do what I can to meet with as many writers as possible over the coming months as we move toward a federal election.

We have important issues to bring to the election debates: not just the precarious financial status of Canadian writers and the need for more money for grants, but for PLR and for a restoration of the principle of fair payment for copying our work. Equally important is the need to explain why the telling and sharing of stories, as well as the expression and exchange of ideas, matters. We will remind the voting public, and the candidates seeking election, why an open and free public discussion of what makes and what constitutes the common good is crucial; why constraints on a plurality of voices and perspectives is unhealthy; and why the kind of "free speech chill" that many commentators say has descended over democratic discourse in this country deserves public attention and concern.

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INDUSTRY Q+A /

TWUC's First Self-Published Member Writes the North and Talks About "Free Love"

BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

In the Spring, the Union accepted its first ever self-published author into the ranks. To find out what motivated her to join and how things are going so far, we sent a handful of questions over to Annelies Pool of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.



You are the first self-published author to be accepted into TWUC. What does being part of the union mean to you?

As a self-published author, being a member of TWUC helps to give me credibility as a professional writer in the eyes of my peers. Even though many professional writers are now self-publishing, it still has the reputation of being a province of amateur writers.

TWUC's vetting process separates the professionals from the amateurs.

What do you write about?

I write about the Canadian North. I've published articles on the North in many magazines and newspapers. I am, however, best known for the funny personal essays I have written about my own northern life. My self-published book *Iceberg Tea* is a collection of these essays.

What inspired you to write and publish your own book of essays?

I have been writing personal essays that celebrate both the poignancy and absurdity of my life for my whole career. These essays have been published as columns in newspapers and

magazines and gained a readership throughout the North. A collection seemed the next step but, while I received encouraging comments, the few publishers I sent it to rejected it. Traditional publishing moves very slowly and I did not want to spend years trying to get the book published. At the same time, new technology has made self-publishing more accessible. With a background in magazine and newspaper publishing, I understand the publishing process. Self-publishing was an obvious fit for me.

You live in Yellowknife. What's the community and support like for writers there?

For a small city of 20,000 people, Yellowknife has an amazingly vibrant writing community. But we do not have access to local creative writing courses, agents, or publishers, so writing can be a lonely business here. However, for a number of years I have been involved with NorthWords NWT, an organization that offers writing workshops, mentoring, hosts an annual festival and provides a focal point for writers. I doubt that I would have had the courage to publish *Iceberg Tea* without the moral support provided by NorthWords.

What are you working on now? What's next for you?

I am just putting the finishing touches on my first novel *Free Love* which I expect to publish before Christmas of this year. Set in Yellowknife in the 1980s, *Free Love* is the story of Marissa as she struggles to quit drinking with the help of the eccentric people in Yellowknife's recovery community.

COMIC BY SCOT RITCHIE



Broken English and Two Loyalties

BY LUIS ALBERTO MATTA



Twelve years ago I found myself immersed in a new human landscape. How to forget that first time in Toronto's subway? I certainly had the feeling of being on an inspired worldwide trip.

While watching those beautiful and diverse faces, I was picturing their distant and mysterious countries... — That couple seems to be from Central Africa; this guy in front is from Vietnam or China? The woman with a headscarf and those big gorgeous eyes comes from Afghanistan or perhaps Iraq? And beside me was an old white woman with green eyes holding a book... I was astonished having that planet around me! My diary had a fascinating opening that night: "Today I have met the world".

At that moment my belongings were seven suitcases crammed with Spanish-language books — Pablo Neruda, Garcia Marquez, Borges, Cortazar, Juan Rulfo, as well as Walt Whitman and all the stories I could bring about my home country; a Colombia beset by civil and armed conflict. Sharing my adventure were also my beloved wife and my little son. In addition I had a few gringo dollars in my pocket.

Outside the world was impressively exciting: even beautiful. My son fell in love with the snow and together we ignored the harsh winter welcoming us in Toronto. My feelings were pushing me to write about this new universe; however, very soon I realized that my mind and my soul were still anchored in Colombia.

Before fleeing my country I had published a book on the genocide against the Patriotic Union, a democratic movement that was almost exterminated for successfully challenging the establishment in open elections. My book documented the ruthless killings of many social and human rights leaders, some of them my personal friends: victims of death squads or paramilitary groups dedicated to assassinating civilians under the pretext of fighting the insurgency. Writing about human rights was a dangerous job back in Colombia. This occupation made me a target and I ended up immersed in a life with a new status.

Like thousands from around the world, I became an anonymous refugee unable to speak the local language or write a simple letter. As a writer I was stuck and lost in this peaceful land called Canada.

Despite the challenge of returning to a quasi-elementary school, I had feelings of happiness when my ESL classes began. This time

I was directly interacting with classmates from remote countries of the world. I was happy to know that of my dedicated teachers, one was a member of Amnesty International, and other linked to social justice grassroots in the GTA. Nothing better, I thought, than learning how to write and speak in English while discussing topics of my interest.

Soon I enhanced my Canadian network; many of my new friends were expats like me from all over the world. I also became engaged with organizations such as Amnesty International, PEN Canada and the Mennonites. Certainly this community engagement helped me to understand the complexity of Toronto's personality. Afterwards PEN Canada gave me a pretentious title that honestly I really liked: Writer-in-exile! For me it was a call to reconnect and reinvent myself in a new universe in which exile meant absence, but at the same time, Canada meant revival.

Since then I have sought answers to the question: How can I reconcile my two loyalties? Though I follow closely what is happening in Colombia today and I am enticed to write about people dealing with civil war and peace attempts in that country, new ties compel me to write about contemporary Canadian society and its contradictions. There is also another problem: I believe that writers should testify their way of being in the world by using the local language, and my English is still broken.

Nevertheless, my imagination soars beyond my cultural limbo as I contemplate writing about the unseen luggage of dreams from immigrants and refugees. I want to write about love, family, and solitude in Canada, about local history and pride, about experiencing poverty in a powerful country, about that magic cultural coexistence and peace you breathe in the Canadian society.

While finding the horizon in my Canadian journey, especially in those hard early years, I had several survival jobs that I now consider part of my 'university of life'. For instance, when I packed my dreams, I did not include becoming a cleaner in my plans. However, those well known newcomers' vicissitudes led me sometime to be the cleaner of the food court at Yorkdale Mall in Toronto. I also was a dishwasher in a Jewish banquet hall, a waiter, a construction helper, a house painter, and a small truck driver bringing meat, pies, and vegetables from Elmira, a small region in Ontario where Amish Mennonites try to live and cultivate land as they did two centuries ago. Except when I was underpaid, those jobs, as in my younger days, challenged my life, forcing me to approach a simpler human world.

Finally when my English was a little better I found one of the most meaningful jobs of my life: settlement and employment counsellor. Since 2009 my commitment and advocacy has been mostly supporting immigrants and refugees to get properly established in Canada. Their stories challenge my imagination every day and remind me, again and again, how it is to live with two loyalties.

Luis Alberto Matta is a writer, researcher and human rights activist from Colombia. He has lived in Canada since 2002.

This column is part of a series exploring the lives of writers-in-exile now living in Canada. It is a partnership between TWUC and PEN Canada.



Behind the Scenes with the Founder of Authors for Indies

BY JANIE CHANG

Over the past decade, brick-and-mortar bookstores have suffered, and none more than the independent bookstore. Every time a venerable bookstore closes its doors, there are cries of indignation and ululations of grief. Every time I read about a bookstore going under, I feel sad and angry. I feel helpless.

That's why the American event 'Indies First' captured my attention. In November 2013, more than 1,000 American authors volunteered at indie bookstores across the country. It was a grassroots movement backed up with marketing support from the American Booksellers Association. It increased book sales and was so successful that it's become an annual event. I was sure someone would replicate the model for Canada.

But no one picked up on it.

Then I thought: how hard could it be? Those classic and fatal words. Armed with the blithe belief (common to those brain-washed by a career in tech marketing) that you can do anything

if you have a good website, I emailed a list of B.C. authors. More than 40 of them replied to this first email to say they'd participate in such an event. Then I talked to a few bookstore owners. They all said yes, they'd love to do something similar in Canada.

By the time the Authors for Indies website went live in March 2015, our core team of volunteers had gelled: Susannah Ames, ECW Press; Kate Earnshaw, HarperCollins Canada; Lesley Fletcher, Retail Council of Canada; and Mary-Ann Yazedjian, Main Street Book Warehouse. My friend Margaret Reynolds created the website and offered to keep it updated.

We scheduled a conference call with the American Booksellers Association's marketing team, who gave us a very helpful briefing on their experiences running the Indies First events. The Ameri-



The inaugural Canadian Author 4 Indies day took place May 2, 2015. 123 independent bookstores and 692 Canadian authors participated.



The Author is In! TWUC member Daphne Marlatt visited People's Co-op Bookstore in Vancouver.

cans had Sherman Alexie and Neil Gaiman as spokespersons. We had... hmmm.

It was time to call on Hal Wake, artistic director of the Vancouver Writers Fest. I asked for help finding an eminent CanLit author to be the face of Authors for Indies. Hal roped in Ann-Marie MacDonald.

The volunteers put in tremendous effort, working long hours between day jobs and freelance gigs. I'm pretty sure my agent thinks I launched Authors for Indies as a big ploy to procrastinate on my manuscript.

There was a lot to do: updating bookstore and author entries every day, sending out weekly emails to encourage authors and stores to spread the word; contacting newspapers, radio, TV, and online publications; writing blogs; inviting authors to guest blog; replying to emails; updating website content and refreshing images; managing social media; creating marketing materials for booksellers, and a hundred other unanticipated tasks that made me kick myself for ever starting the project.

Momentum started building. Word got around. People dug into expertise, contacts, and time. KOVE Productions created a promotional video. 100 bookstores and 500 authors signed up. Then 600 authors. Penguin Random House placed a half-page ad in the *Globe and Mail*. Media attention escalated, with coverage in publications such as the *Vancouver Sun*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*, and *Toronto Star*. CBC Books had us take over their Twitter account on the big day.

Then all of a sudden, it was The Big Day: Saturday, May 2, 2015. The first Canadian Authors for Indies Day. 123 independent bookstores across Canada were hosting 692 authors, who would be working as guest booksellers. I kept telling myself the team had done as much as possible and the situation was now out of our hands. Short of abducting pedestrians and shoving them into bookstores, there wasn't much more we could do at this point to influence results.

Social media provided lots of evidence that everyone was having a great time. Authors were living out their fantasies of working in bookstores (under conditions that prevented them from doing too much damage). We received email from stores who compared customer traffic to their busiest days in December. Some reported two to three times their usual Saturday sales. There was also a big

spike on Twitter as #Authors4Indies became the second-highest trending hashtag across Canada. I still resent that royal baby.

But how would all this translate into sales across the whole country?

We had no idea until BookNet came through with the numbers a week later. They reported an average increase across the board of 18.5% in books sold at participating stores. I'm not well-versed in retail benchmarks but the Retail Council of Canada says it's an amazing result.

Numbers provide quantifiable metrics for success, but the longer-term benefits of Authors for Indies are not measurable. I truly feel we have become a closer and more supportive community of authors, booksellers, readers, and publishers. The event drew extra attention from the book industry as well as consumers. Whole-hearted participation from hundreds of authors was recognition that indie bookstores are critical to our publishing ecosystem and national literary culture.

I harbour no illusions that Authors for Indies will single-handedly make Canada's independent bookstores thrive. There are just too many dynamics in this industry. At the very least it's an opportunity to show independent booksellers how much we value their support in this often psychosis-inducing business called publishing. The best I can hope for is that momentum from Authors for Indies carries through year after year, introducing new customers to local bookstores and local authors.

Personally, I just wanted to stop feeling so helpless.

NOTE: The Retail Council of Canada has sent a survey to bookstores. We want to learn whether stores want a 2016 event, and if so, which activities were effective and which ones we can drop from the list. If you want to know more about Authors for Indies, check out the website: www.authorsforindies.com and Like the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AuthorsforIndies>). The email address AuthorsforIndies@gmail.com remains active.

Janie Chang's debut novel Three Souls was a finalist for the 2014 B.C. Book Prizes Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize and long listed for the 2015 IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. She is a graduate of The Writer's Studio at Simon Fraser University. Born in Taiwan, she has lived in the Philippines, Iran, Thailand, New Zealand, and now lives in Vancouver.