



## Newfoundland Writers' Guild

P. O. Box 1133 – St. John's  
Newfoundland and Labrador, A1C 5M5

# The Page

January 2014

### Editorial

#### The Many Forms of Writing

We join the Guild because we are writers. Some of us are professionals; some are weekend dabblers, but all of us take a great deal of care with the writing we bring to the Guild for critique. Most of us spend many hours every day writing on our computers or writing by hand, but only a tiny proportion of the writing we produce every day we consider suitable to take to a Guild Workshop. We take our short stories, our novels, our non-fiction, our memoirs and our poetry. That's pretty much it.

Quite apart from any academic or professional writing, every day we write e-mails by the score: organizing meetings or projects, communicating with friends near and far, issuing invitations, discussing items with fellow board or committee members; we write letters of complaint or support, we write letters to MPs, we draft constitutions and reports, we respond to suggestions, we check up on missing items. All this writing is a vital part of our collective life, but we often do not recognize it as "writing" or pay it the same respect or attention that we give to our "creative" work. This is mistake.

We know the extent of awful grammar and ignorant writing that is out there. Even if we haven't suffered the same pain that Lynne Truss feels in *Eats Shoots and Leaves*, we must have been offended by the "comments" trail that appears underneath *Evening Telegram* articles, or the "tweets" that CBC TV so unkindly shares with us. The other day I read a letter of resignation that was so badly written I had trouble working out what the writer was resigning from, much less why. We ourselves are not innocent. We have all experienced the reverberations from an impulsive or badly timed e-mail response. Many of us will have suffered the agonies that follow from an inadvertent "reply all". How many of us re-read and correct our e-mail messages, Christmas card notes, or even letters to the editor or opinion pieces with the same care that we give to our Guild offerings?

Such casual use of the written language does matter. It matters because of the history of writing. As Jared Diamond points out in his loftily, but accurately, titled book *Guns, Germs and Steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years*, the earliest inventors of writing intended it for very specific people and very specific purposes. "The kings and priests of ancient Sumer wanted writing to be used by professional scribes to record numbers of sheep owed in taxes, not by the masses to write poetry and

hatch plots. As anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss put it, ancient writing's main function was 'to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings'" (Diamond 2005: 235). We, the people, and especially women, struggled for many centuries to claim the right to learn how to write and even today, young women like Malala have to continue that fight. Today we use writing more than ever and in ways and in contexts that our grandmothers could not have envisaged. We spend more time writing, in many more different forms, and we have the capacity to distribute what we write more widely.

I am not suggesting that we bring our e-mail correspondence or letters of complaint to Guild meetings for critique, but I am suggesting that we think more carefully every time we tap a key or pick up a pen. We need to treat everything we write with the same respect and care we give to our creative writing, and ask ourselves if what we are writing is worthy of a writer of the Newfoundland Writers' Guild?

**Marilyn Porter**

The Editorial Committee for this issue of *The Page* was: **Lillian Bouzane, Elizabeth Tobin, Marilyn Porter, Grace Bavington and Roberta Buchanan** with technical assistance from **Georgina Queller**.

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*THE PAGE Committee is hoping the following column, THE ART AND BUSINESS OF WRITING, will be a permanent fixture of our newsletter; to insure it becomes so, the person who writes the last column will be responsible for securing the name of the person to write the next one. The name will be announced at the end of each column. The topic is broad enough to allow you to write about any aspect of writing. The next column could be about your tax return.*

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## **THE ART AND BUSINESS OF WRITING: GIVING CHARACTERS CHALLENGES**

In my writing career, I have always found that one of the hardest things to do is give challenges to characters in fiction. When writing, there seems to be a tendency to sometimes over-identify with characters, especially the main character. Presently, this is doubly true for me, as I am on the verge of a very difficult chapter in one of my fanfiction works, where I will have to put the main character through utter hell.

Naturally, when I complete this chapter, I expect to have to lock myself in my room, turn off the lights, and cry for a few hours.

Theatricality aside, this is one of the necessary evils of crafting plots, be they simple or complex. If the protagonist were never challenged, then there would be no plot at all – nothing would happen. Whether by specific antagonist, external situation, or their own internal struggle, protagonists must experience some form of resistance to their goals in order for a story to exist.

In preschool books, the dog or cat must look for their missing toy in order to find it.

In older children's mystery books, the boy or girl must search for clues, occasionally hitting a dead end before they find that crucial clue to break a case.

In books for adolescents, the teen underdog must strain against oppressive grade-schemes or popular jocks/cheerleaders before finally connecting with their crush.

In adult suspense, the everyday citizen must run for his or her life, to survive long enough to uncover the conspiracy they have stumbled into.

And in comic-books, the superhero must, from time to time, fall prey to the schemes of a supervillain, in order to rise again.

Without the plummet of seeing a beloved character struggle, and even suffer, readers (and writers) would never know the uplift of seeing their hero rise again. It is something of a paradox – to make a character suffer in order to give them victory – but it is one that no writer can avoid.

That does not, however, mean that we must like it.

Dylan Seward

**Bobbie Brennan** will write this column for the next edition of *The Page*.

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## PROFILES OF THE NEW BOARD MEMBERS

(Continued from the last issue of *The Page*)

### Susan Sinnott, Member at Large

*How did you become involved in the Guild?* I was looking for a writers' group about two years ago and phoned WANL. They suggested the Guild and gave me a phone number to contact and I began attending their workshops, which I found very interesting. This Fall I got more involved by joining the Board as a member at large.

*What kind of writing do you do?* Fiction; I find short stories good practice but unsatisfying - I get interested in the characters and want to watch them grow. I have been working on a novel for years - revising, revising, revising and sent the latest draft to the Arts & Letters Competition. I have submitted pieces over the years and though I've never won anything I always appreciate the comments.

A second writing group arose out of a wonderful MUN course in Fiction that I took from Lisa Moore in 2012. This group is quite different because members are young (except for myself as the sole retiree) and meets every two weeks for an intensive review of each others' fiction and sometimes of published authors, giving rise to lively discussions.

I wondered if it were appropriate to belong to two writing groups but they are very different from each other and feedback from varied perspectives is always helpful. Also the Guild involves additional genres – poetry, biography, young adult fiction and memoir – and because, being an older group, there is a wide range of writing experience amongst the members. Some members are pioneers of Newfoundland writing and it has been an honour to meet them.

I have completed several writing courses, workshops etc. since retirement and have learned from every single one, from both teachers and participants. I'm now enrolled in a MUN creative non-fiction course from Robert Finlay starting in January to stretch my horizons a little more.

*What's on your bedside table?* The most engrossing book I'm currently reading is too heavy, at 900 pages of hardcover, to read in bed – *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton, the 2013 Mann Booker winner. I would risk trauma to the nose if it fell and I'd develop tendinitis of the wrists just holding it up. So it is on the coffee table in the worthy company of recently read tomes such as Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and George Elliot's *Middlemarch*, one of my all time favourites.

On my bedside table are smaller books, such as *Road Ends*, the last of the *Crow Lake* trilogy by Mary Lawson, and *The Silent Wife* by A.S.A. Harrison and such relaxing re-reads, for stressful days, as Jane Austen and *Paradoxides* by Don McKay. This last is categorized by the author as a "bridge book" between prose and poetry. I am not a poetry reader on the whole but love these poems, so perhaps I'm half way there.

**Carol Mitchell, Treasurer**

*How did you come to join the Guild?* My then next-door neighbour, **Georgina Queller**, introduced me to the Guild in June 2011. I had retired the year before and had mentioned to **Georgina** that I intended my post-retirement activities to include explorations of several creative activities, such as drawing, music and writing. She encouraged me, successfully, to attend the June Eastport retreat as a guest. I was very warmly welcomed by the other attendees and given lots of encouragement to “do some writing!” By the time of the July workshop at Rotary Park, I was inspired to become a Guild member.

*What kind of writing do you do? What would you like to do?* I have not been doing any consistent writing. For several years I have kept a journal and I have completed some short memoir prose pieces. Several genres appeal to me; my current intention is to write some poetry featuring family members.

*What is on your bedside table?* I wanted to read all 5 of the books on the 2013 Giller prize shortlist, and have just accomplished that by finishing Dennis Bock’s novel *Going Home Again*. Now I am reading *Braco* by local author Lesleyanne Ryan. It is set in 1995 when the city of Srebrenica falls to Serbian forces.

*Tell us something about yourself.* I came to Newfoundland from Alberta in 1974 and quickly realized that I wanted to make my home here, a decision that I have never regretted. In St. John’s, I worked with an accounting firm and then with the provincial government. Since retiring, I love to try many new activities, the most recent of which is line dancing.

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**Workshop Report**

**November 17, 2013 Designated Workshop**

Only one submission was received for the designated workshop; four poems by **Joan MacIntosh**: “Doves Coo the Old Ones to Sleep”, “I’ll Swallow Memory”, “White-Winged Spell” and “Turret Windows “. Eleven people attended and there was a lively discussion of **Joan’s** poems. In the time remaining **Lily Bursey** read a prose piece, “Mixed Emotions”, which was then workshopped by those present. This piece is intended to be part of a sequel to her book *Amy’s Journey*.

**January 12, 2014 Workshop**

Thirteen people attended the January Workshop, including one new member, **Debbie Andrews**. Welcome to the Guild **Debbie**. There were two presenters: **Susan Sinnott** read Chapter 5 of her novel in progress, *Just like Always*; and **Elizabeth Tobin** read four poems/selections from her journal. Both aroused a great deal of interest and comment.

**Roberta Buchanan & Georgina Queller**

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## CHRISTMAS PARTY 2013

The Guild held its annual Christmas party on December 6th at St. Mark's church hall, Logy Bay Road. **Ellen Reid** emceed the evening, beginning with a silent tribute to **Paul O'Neill**, **Eileen Dicks**, and **Don Steele**, the three Guild members who passed away in 2013. Some twenty Guild members and guests enjoyed a relaxing evening of good food, **Grace Bavington's** non-alcoholic punch, readings, recitations, gift exchanges, door prizes, music - with **Sheilah Roberts** leading on guitar, and **Ellen Reid's** challenging word scrambles on the names of Newfoundland writers. As in past years, **Helen Fogwill Porter's** recitations and **Roberta Buchanan's** readings were enthusiastically received by all.

Winners of this year's Prose and Poetry Contest announced during the evening were: Poetry: Winner - **Sheilah Roberts**; Honourable Mentions - **Jo Shawyer** and **Lillian Bouzane**. Prose: **Diana Gustafson**; Honourable Mentions - **Esther Brown** and **Jo Shawyer**. A special thank you to judges **Kate Evans**, prose, and **Georgina Queller**, poetry, who did a fine job outlining how and why they arrived at their decisions. Thank you as well to **Bobbie Brennan** who set the poetry topic. Congratulations to the winners and bravo to all members who submitted their writings. (We had a respectable total of 12 entries this year.) Prizes for the evening were chosen from a generous donation of books by local publishers. Many thanks to **Laura Jackson** for her efforts in contacting the various publishers. Thanks also go to **Helen Fogwill Porter** for her donation of a copy of the audio version of her book, *Below the Bridge*, for a prize, which was won by member **Carol Mitchell**.

Continuing on with a "tradition" begun two years ago by the newly-elected Board, the current Guild President, **Elizabeth Tobin**, acknowledged the work of the previous Board with the presentation of certificates of appreciation to those members present. (Members and guests will recall that **Dylan Seward** was briefly elevated to Dylan Thomas!) Our thanks to **Georgina Queller** who did up the certificates "sans" her personal computer.

A large thank you to **Joan Scott** and **Ellen Reid** who, with a great deal of enthusiasm, put together a relaxing and enjoyable evening. (We even had attractively *printed* programs.) Thank you also, to all who helped out with the setting up and the post-party clean up.

Elizabeth Tobin

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## Christmas Contest Winning Entries

### Winning Story

#### A Christmas Memory

I had to pee. I opened one eye. It was daylight. I wasn't a baby anymore so I wasn't allowed to use the pee pot. I was a big girl so I had to put on my coat and boots to walk to the outhouse at the back of the yard. I slithered out of my warm sleeping bag pulling down my nightie to cover my knees. The oak boards creaked as I crossed the floor. In the front room, Grandma was scooping up the bed linens from the fold-out sofa where Mommy and Daddy had been sleeping. I followed her into the kitchen and stood close but not too close to the wood stove.

"Where's Mommy?" Grandma dropped a bloody sheet into the big silver wash basin on the floor. "Daddy took her to the hospital." I shivered as she tipped the bucket pouring cold water down onto the sheet - pushing red into pink swirls around the basin. "Did they go to get the baby?" Grandma leaned over to kiss the top of my head before returning to scrub the sheet.

The light bulb hanging from the ceiling was too bright. My eyes stung as if I might cry. I missed my Mommy.

Daddy brought Mommy home a few days later. He helped her take off her coat and boots. I wanted to touch her belly where I knew she used to hide the baby to keep it safe and warm. Why did it want to come out too soon? Stupid baby! Now everyone was sad at Christmas. I wasn't going to talk about that baby ever again.

**Diana Gustafson**

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## **Honourable Mention**

### **Home for the Holidays**

Armed with the admonishment to cut only a spruce tree not a "snotty var", I took my sleigh and the recently sharpened axe across the frozen pond. I would know the spruce my mother told me by the fat bushy limbs. A snotty var was a skinny, sparsely limbed excuse for an evergreen. She had no use for them, as long before Christmas was over, they would be oozing sap over everything.

I had no idea I would fall in love with the dainty proportions of the snotty var. An hour or so into the woods I found it; the ideal tree, perfectly proportioned limbs from top to bottom. Knowing full well my choice may have very little welcome in the household; I cut it down anyway, imagining the garlands, bulbs and icicles hanging in perfect array. Not being a completely stunned child; I also cut a spruce which was clearly inferior even for a spruce tree, hoping, given the choice, mother would concede. It was not to be. Instead both trees were consigned to the woodpile and she hired a couple of boys to cut her a spruce.

Years later, a small basement apartment became home, another trip to the woods produced a beautiful "snotty var", this time whisked home on the roof of my Chevette. Soon tree lights sparkled and danced among a myriad of tinsel; wind and snow beat around tiny windows, the tea kettle sang merrily on the back of the stove. I was home!

**Esther Brown**

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## **Honourable Mention**

### **An Embarrassment of Riches**

We lived in a small farming community. My father died in 1956. There were left my mother and four children, all in school.

We were immediately plunged into poverty. When Christmas loomed, we braced ourselves. We kids knew that it would be a sad and meagre affair.

However, the day before Christmas, we woke to find a frozen Christmas turkey left on our doorstep. Donor unidentified. There was great excitement. Christmas dinner was assured.

An hour later a man from the church delivered the second Christmas turkey. My mother protested that she had already received one. "No, no. Take it. You are on my list." He hurried away to complete his deliveries. Two Christmas turkeys!

By lunchtime we had a third Christmas turkey. It had been donated by a local service club.

Embarrassed at this skewed distribution of charity, my mother suggested that we take one of the turkeys to another family who we knew – a widow with six children.

We made our way through wind and weather and walked the last half mile up a snowed-in farm lane lugging our frozen bird. The door was opened, and we were welcomed into the warm kitchen. And there, on the kitchen table, laid in a neat row, were three Christmas turkeys!

**Jo Shawyer**

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### **Winning Poem**

#### **Christmas Star**

On stage, a small head and legs protrude  
from yellow, five-pointed poster board  
Kindergarten actors,

tea towelled, bathrobed wise men

"WHO TRAVEL AFAR,"  
one bold voice proclaims,  
"TO FOLLOW YONDER MOVING STAR."

But the celestial body, knees together, squirms  
As wise men gaze in wonder upon

its golden trickle and spreading puddle.

**Sheilah Roberts**

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### **Honourable Mention**

#### **Twinkle Twinkle Christmas Star**

We know you journeyed long ago  
To Bethlehem to cast your glow  
Two thousand years have passed between  
Now you appear at Hallowe'en  
In shops, among the Christmas lights  
It's hard to see you, or your might  
On every lawn, another tree  
Shines red, blue, green, hiding thee  
Shoppers hurry, money sounds  
Your commercial values knows no bounds

**Jo Shawyer**

## Honourable Mention

### The Star

They changed the story  
It was three queens who followed the star  
From Babylon to Bethlehem  
Loaded with presents  
For Mary and The Babe  
Belly bands, nappies  
A blanket sewed with strands of gold  
And herbs, foreign to Jerusalem

One Queen had a dream - of a flight into Egypt  
She gave Mary fourteen gold rings to trade on the way.

**Lillian Bouzane**

(With a nod to Carol-Ann Duffy)

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## MEMBERS' NEWS

**Joan MacIntosh's** poem "Even the Captain" was published on the Leafpress website in September, 2013. "Companion to the Moon" and "Ginger Cat" were published on the Shambhala poetry page in November. Leafpress is publishing "Freight Train Whistle" in an "oakleaf" form. An "oakleaf" is a five page folder with one verse published on each page. As well, I have been making "poetry blocks". These are wooden blocks decorated with poetry and coloured paper.

**Jennifer Morgan** is one of three winners in EVENT Magazine's 2013 Non-Fiction Contest. The contest was adjudicated by Russell Wangersky. **Jennifer's** essay "Inshallah" will be printed in the January 2014 issue.

**Geraldine Chafe Rubia** has had two of her poems accepted to be reprinted by *Geez Magazine*. *Geez*, a counter-culture Christian magazine influenced by Ad Busters, will be publishing **Gerry's** poems in their first issue of 2014. That issue will be discussing disability, spirituality and beauty - topics often explored by **Gerry**.

**Bernice Morgan** performed a narrative called "Seasons Before the War" with the Shallaway Choir at Gower Street United Church. **Bernice's** novel, *Random Passage*, was recommended on the CBC radio Cross Country Check-up programme as a book to read. It is also listed on the programme's website.

Several years ago, **Jeff Rose-Martland** wrote *Call Centre: The Musical* for submission to the Arts & Letters Competition. Not being a musician, he used song parodies. Arts & Letters didn't like it. Eventually, **Jeff** released it as an e-book; free, to avoid royalty issues with record companies.

Last summer, he was contacted by Rok Starr films in Australia. They had a similar idea; to produce a musical based on a call centre. They had read **Jeff's** script and wanted him to produce a new script, with original songs, incorporating some of their plot ideas. They intended to mount the musical for the 2015 Adelaide Fringe Festival. **Jeff** is currently writing furiously, as the script was/is due for the beginning of 2014. **Jeff's** other commitments, particularly advocating for veterans, had forced this script to the bottom of his To Do list for the

Fall. But work is proceeding well and the composer is pleased with his song ideas. You can read the original script here: <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/13928>

Since the launch of **Laura Morry Williams'** book, *Over the Fence: Stories from Outport Newfoundland*, in September, she has been concentrating on its success and is pleased with the sales and positive reactions of the readers. In this pause before she begins another writing project, **Laura** says she is enjoying reading the works of other Newfoundland authors.

**Hilda Murray** has had a corrected version of her book *More Than 50%* republished. The 2010 version had many errors, and after many conversations with her publisher, a new and corrected version is now on the bookshelves and is being sold at Costco and other bookstores. Congratulations **Hilda** on your persistence.

**Ellen Reid** reports that the Wednesday Ship Poetry Group were featured in the latest edition of *WANL Word*. This group includes **Cecilia Maloney, Cathy Stockwood, Florence Samson, Gwen Brooker** and **Ellen Reid**. All of these writers are either past or current Guild members. For the second year in a row **Ellen's** New Year's resolution is to take 100 walks. She will be blogging these romps on the following site: <http://towniegirl100walks.blogspot.ca>

**Joan Scott** has reported that on January 1 she was seated comfortably at the Sheraton waiting for friends to show up. To while away the time, she began taking notes on the people passing hither and yon. Every piece of writing has to start somewhere.

**Roberta Buchanan** wrote two memoir pieces: "Bill Marshall, in Memoriam", and "Where Were You When...?" on the JFK assassination. She read them at her MUN Pensioners' Association Memoir Group. **Roberta** also read three poems by Dorothy Parker at the Guild Christmas party.

**Helen Fogwill Porter** performed two recitations at the Guild Christmas party. A traditional one and the other, called "Danny Boy", was a satirical composition of her own based on the Londonderry air "Oh Danny Boy".

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## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO WRITE A STORY?

The very act of writing, the confidence to write, may take years. Honed by writing compositions in school, honed by being a reader, honed by observation and imagination.

But there has to be opportunity too. Some years ago I read that Alice Munro, as a young stay-at-home mother, totally occupied by her three young children, laid her notebook (paper, not digital) on the top of her washing machine in the kitchen and began to write. In 1985, I followed Alice's example. I laid a fresh, new, crisp notebook on the end of the kitchen counter, out of the reach of four young children, and began to write a fiction story.

The story was already in my head. I simply needed a time and a place in which to write it. I snatched down sentences while waiting for the potatoes to boil. I edited paragraphs while the children drew pictures. I settled the children with Play-Doh while I sketched out a new chapter. After some days, the story in my head had become a reality on paper.

It was only a little story, suitable for eight year olds reading their first "proper" book. It was shorter than many other pieces which I had written. But it was a milestone for me. Up to that time, my writing experience had been in nonfiction: essays, theses, academic articles, reports, exhibit texts, community histories, minutes of meetings. This was my first flight into fiction.

But, to be honest, I must admit that my little fiction story grew out of my nonfiction work. While fulfilling a contract for historical research, I had come across an incident in 1858 of a baby being left on a doorstep. My fiction story was built around that incident: who had left the baby on the doorstep? And why?

However, soon after my story was written down, we moved from Ontario to Newfoundland. And I was sunk into the wifely and motherly turmoil of a new city, new house, new schools, new friends, and new jobs for both my husband and myself. Life was busy. I never unpacked my story.

Twenty years later, in 2005, I retired from teaching at Memorial University. At last, time was mine. The first thing I did was hunt out my story. I still liked it. I worked on it again and it was finally published in 2008.\* That's how long it took me to write that story.

It is now 2013. I am eight years into retirement. Those glorious carefree early days of retirement are over. I have become busy with social activities, a Memoir group, the Writers' Guild, and more academic research projects. The Agricultural History Society even holds its meetings in my kitchen! I have another story in my head. But when is there opportunity to write it down? Perhaps I need to lay another notebook on my kitchen counter. A digital one, this time.

\* Jo Shawyer, *Twenty-Dollar Reward*, Scholastic Canada, 2008.

**Jo Shawyer**

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**CORRECTION:** Raoul Andersen's name was inadvertently omitted as the author of the *In Memoriam of Don Steele* in the November 2013 issue of **The Page**. Apologies to Raoul.

The next **two Guild workshops** are at Sobey's Howley Estates on **Sunday, February 16** and **Sunday, March 16** from **2:00 until 5:00 PM**.

MUN's 5<sup>th</sup> Annual **SPARKS Literary Festival** is **Sunday, January 19, 2014 from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM** at the Suncor Hall of Music, MUN. Reception to follow. A Nature Poem Competition, deadline January 15, is also being sponsored. Google - Sparks - to get festival and contest details.

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