

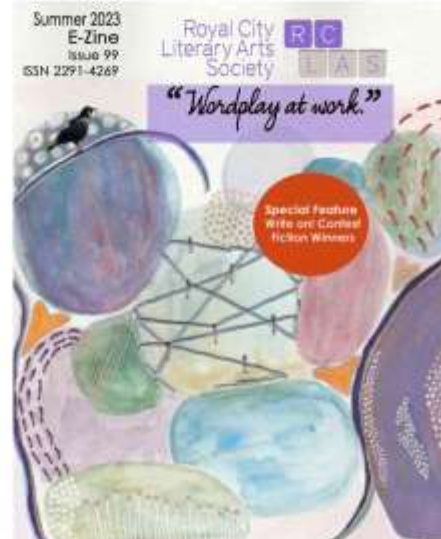
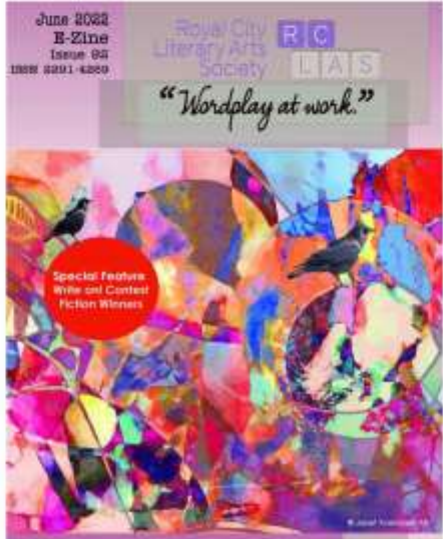
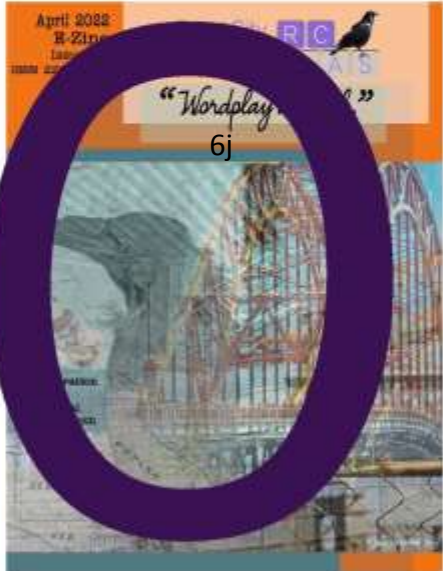
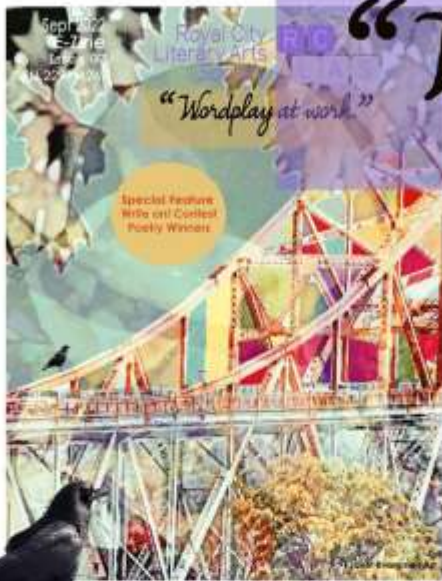
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Royal City
Literary Arts
Society



Special Feature
Write on! Contest
Non-Fiction & Poetry
Winners

"Wordplay at work."





We are thrilled to present the
100th issue of *Wordplay at work!*
This issue features the Write on! Contest
Non-Fiction and Fiction winners.

Thank you!

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Royal City
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10th Annual
Fred Cogswell **Award**
For Excellence In Poetry



“Fred Cogswell (1917-2004) was a prolific poet, editor, professor, life member of the League of Canadian Poets, and an Officer of the Order of Canada.”

Call For Submissions

Open to Canadian writers
who had a book published in English in 2022

1st Prize \$500 2nd Prize \$250 3rd Prize \$100

For more information & submission details, please visit
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Judge: Joseph A. Dandurand

- * Award-winning poet, storyteller, playwright and member of Kwantlen First Nation.
- * 2021 Griffin Prize Finalist (*The East Side of It All*)
- * 2022 Latner Writers' Trust Poetry Prize Winner.

10th ANNUAL FRED COGSWELL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN POETRY

<https://rclas.com/2023-contest/>

"Fred Cogswell (1917-2004) was a prolific poet, editor, professor, life member of the League of Canadian Poets, and an Officer of the Order of Canada."

First Prize:	\$500
Second Prize:	\$250
Third Prize:	\$100

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- Book must be bound as a book, not a chapbook.
- Book length must be a minimum of 60 pages in length.
- Poetry must be written in English by a single author.
- No co-writes, anthologies or selected poetry collections.
- Book must be original work by an individual author (translations will not be considered at this time)
- Original date of publication falls **between January 1, 2022 and December 31, 2022.**
- Book must be published in Canada.
- Book must be written by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident alive in submission year.
- Electronic books are not eligible.

Joseph Dandurand is the judge for our 2023 Fred Cogswell Award For Excellence In Poetry.

Reading Fee: \$25 (Canadian Funds).

Payment can be made through PayPal here <https://rclas.com/2023-contest/>

or by cheque payable to "Royal City Literary Arts Society". If you pay with PayPal, please include a copy of your receipt with the submission package.

Two copies* of the book must be submitted to the Royal City Literary Arts Society, along with the reading fee (or proof thereof), and must be postmarked no later than October 1, 2023. The society's mailing address is:

Royal City Literary Arts Society
Fred Cogswell Award
Box #308 - 720 6th Street
New Westminster, BC V3L 3C5

Winners Announcement: Date TBA

Winning authors & titles will be published in the RCLAS's *Wordplay* e-zine.

*Submitted books will not be returned; they become the property of the Royal City Literary Arts Society.

*In case of any dispute about the book's eligibility, the Society's decision will be final. If any conflict of interest is to be determined the book will be deemed ineligible.

Call for Submissions

members only

rclas ezine

deadline OCT 15

Poetry or short story

eerie

spooky

supernatural

hallowe'en

creepy

samhain

dark

tribute to a dead poet



11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023 Non-Fiction Winners & Honourable Mentions



11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
First Place Winner
Non-Fiction

THE SPIDER
© Lesley Hebert

As I flushed the toilet, I noticed something brown and fuzzy hiding in the dark corner behind the W.C, definitely not an auspicious start to my stay in Tateyama, Japan.

Is that a mouse? I thought.

I looked closer, and discovered it was a hairy spider the size of my fist. I made a rapid exit from the bathroom and headed to the kitchen where Michiko, my host, was preparing breakfast.

“Michiko,” I stammered, “There’s a spider in your toilet.”

I expected a horrified reaction, but she didn’t even blink.

"It's OK," she shrugged, "That's my pet. Please sit down and eat breakfast."

We sat down to miso soup, salted mackerel, potato salad, and fragrant fresh-baked bread. Raindrops pounded on the window. Michiko’s husband Yoshi turned on the T.V. to check the weather forecast and announced that a typhoon was on the way.

The rain eased up after breakfast, so we took advantage of a break in the weather to go for a walk. As we left the house, Michiko handed me an umbrella “just in case.”

As it turned out, the umbrella was useful protection from more than the rain. I was horrified to discover that our path ran perilously close to a vast curtain of gargantuan spider webs strung between a line of telephone poles. As thick as fishing line, the strands of these vast webs stretched twenty meters from one pole to the next. At the center of each web lurked a grey and green monster with a crimson belly, a body the size of a hockey puck, and outstretched legs almost a foot across. The toilet spider I had met that morning was a dwarf in comparison.

Feeling mounting sympathy for the flies of this world, I tried to avoid the coarse webs festooned everywhere as we walked down the lane to the beach. The sun shining through a break

in the clouds warmed my face. The soft sand yielded beneath my feet as I walked beside the water and listened to the gentle breaking of the waves.

We wandered along the high-water mark past piles of feathery red seaweed. Michiko gathered up handfuls of the briny smelling algae, tucked it under her arm and led us back home through a dry rice paddy.

Green heads of rice were beginning to ripen. At the edge of the field, an aging farmer in faded overalls and a broad-brimmed straw hat was unloading large bags of fertilizer from a short-bed white pick-up truck. He saw us approach, stopped working to stretch his back, and wished us good morning.

Michiko introduced him as her neighbour and stopped for a chat. Unable to follow the rapid-fire Japanese conversation, which seemed to be mostly about the upcoming storm, I studied the farmer's patient, deep-lined face, fascinated by his enormous black eyebrows. They were the largest bunches of hair I had ever seen on someone's forehead, outgrowths that sat over his small, sparkling eyes like spiders lying in wait for juicy flies. As he chatted, two-inch long eyebrow hairs waved in the breeze like spider legs.

"He looks too old to be lifting such heavy bags," I commented as we headed back home under the darkening sky. "Doesn't he have anyone to help him?"

"He is like lots of farmers in Japan," answered Michiko. "Their children don't want farm life. His sons have moved away to Tokyo."

Back at the house, I studied my Japanese grammar book. I looked up now and then to stare out of the wide living room window at the looming black clouds or to watch Michiko and Yoshi pottering in the kitchen.

Yoshi was smoking eggs. He laid wood chips in the bottom of an old, blackened frying pan, sprinkled moist tea leaves on the chips and placed a rack on top. He heated the pan on the gas stove, took a dozen peeled hard-boiled eggs from the fridge and placed four of them on the rack. He moved them around slowly and carefully with a pair of tongs until the whites had darkened to light brown, and did the same with the rest of the eggs.

Michiko was washing the seaweed from the beach. She plunged the clean seaweed into a large pot of boiling water and added another bag from the freezer. I suspected we would be eating it with dinner that night, but I was wrong. She drained the cooking liquid into a couple of

large, flat trays, discarded the cooked seaweed into the compost bucket, and set the trays on the counter.

“There,” she announced, covering the trays with clean cloths. “That’s done. Now I will leave the liquid until morning. It will set overnight.”

I realized she had been extracting agar from the seaweed to make gelatin.

“I go see farmer friend,” announced Yoshi when he had finished smoking eggs.

He put the eggs in a white plastic bag, put on a raincoat and a pair of rubber boots, and headed out into the worsening weather. By the time he got back, the rain was lashing down, driven by an ever-strengthening wind.

Michiko turned on the television and sat down to watch a soap opera. I opened my Japanese grammar book, and Yoshi took a nap. The peace was suddenly interrupted by melodic chiming from the T.V. Yoshi woke up with a start.

“It’s an emergency broadcast,” said Michiko. “The typhoon is heading this way. It will be in Tateyama soon.”

I felt panic rising in my throat. Japanese grammar suddenly seemed irrelevant.

Michiko remained unfazed. She walked slowly over to the window and turned a crank to roll down a bank of solid-looking wooden shutters. She walked around the house rolling down more shutters and returned to the kitchen to make a pot of green tea. That done, she settled back into her deep-seated armchair and continued watching her soap opera.

Hurricane force winds blustered around the tightly shuttered house.

“Do think the electricity will go out?” I asked nervously.

“Sometimes it does,” Michiko replied and nonchalantly poured us all a cup of tea. Warm and secure, we sat in front of the television to check on the progress of the typhoon shrieking around us as we sipped our tea. The power stayed on and Michiko and Yoshi, oblivious of the screaming wind, followed their normal evening routine. Michiko cooked chicken, rice and green leafy vegetables for dinner. We watched T.V. until the wailing died down and then went to bed.

The next morning, I stood in the back garden with Michiko and surveyed the storm damage. The blue sky was calm and clear, and a gentle breeze blew in from the ocean. The storm had ripped branches from the trees and scattered them across the lawn.

Michiko chatted about her plans for the day and calmly hauled away branches until she had removed all evidence of the storm. The house was undamaged. The gigantic spider webs

were still strung out between the telegraph poles, each with a gargantuan, green-striped resident lodged securely at its heart. And the solitary farmer, I imagined, would be back working in his fields.

The sunny morning held the promise of a fresh start.

----- copyright Lesley Hebert

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Second Place Winner
Non-Fiction

CULTURAL CRIMINAL
© Kimberley Smart

When I got married at twenty-one, I knew that my days in Amsterdam were numbered. My husband grew up in northern Ontario and wanted Canada to be our home. I had visited Toronto a couple of times, and the city charmed me: it seemed a miniature New York, only less stinky and chaotic. I assumed that I would fit right in when we moved, making friends without a problem, thriving in my new world. How wrong I was about that.

Upon arrival, it immediately struck me that I was more Dutch than I had realized. For starters, Torontonians speak in a different vocal register, one I've named 'the dolphin frequency.' It's specific to the region and extremely pervasive. All vowels get stretched into words onto themselves, and there is always a lot of enthusiasm. It took enormous amounts of practise to not let my face pull into a bewildered frown every time I heard someone yell out, "Hiiiiiii!"

Once I was able to move past this exotic auditory habit, the more pressing issue of actual language proved challenging to me. What most people don't realize is that there is speaking a language, and then there is *speaking a language*. My English was fine, but it wasn't Canadian. Take that tricky four-letter c-word. It is a completely acceptable phrase to use in Amsterdam, doled out to anyone who might inconvenience you in the slightest way. The first time I said it in Toronto in a social interaction, I was referring to the substitute teacher of my daughter's class. The entire table stopped talking to stare at me. Our hostess opened and closed her mouth in rapid succession, looking like a fish that had unexpectedly been pulled out of the water. Realizing the faux-pas, I apologized profusely, and people seemed to find humour in my coarseness. Still, I never got invited back.

After some lingual adjustments, my search for a group of friends took off. Mostly we were surrounded in Yorkville by people employed in nebulous forms of banking. I secretly

started calling this group “Finance Buffoons.” They were immediately recognizable by their slick suits and white-rimmed nostrils. Their wives – my pool of possible friends – seemed to be on a constant auditioning roll call for the real housewives’ franchise. The women were surgically enhanced to a level I had not seen back at home. Faces, boobs, butts - no part remained original. Paying a psychotic level of attention to clothing was a must in this type of existence. They either paraded around Sassafras and the One at Hazelton in full Lululemon outfits – institutional, yet sultry – or they went all out, dressing as if they were multicoloured birds of paradise. Both versions scared me a little. I made fun of them with my friends back in Amsterdam, but still, I was the one sitting at home with an empty agenda.

A visit to our local butcher in the Netherlands made me realize that my cultural issues ran deeper. My daughter – who is so thoroughly Canadian I suspect she has maple syrup running through her veins – and I were waiting our turn when a stressed-out young mother with a two-year old in a stroller arrived. The mom broke into the butcher’s conversation, asking for a piece of *leverworst* for her annoying child, and offered it to the tot while loudly declaring, “And if you don’t shut up now, I will leave you outside in the cold.”

The butcher pointed her blood-stained finger at the pram. “This is the most awful age of your kid that you will encounter,” she said. “Life will never get worse than what it is right now for you.” She combined her comment with a murderous look to the child, which silenced its mewling immediately.

Another butcher laughed and said, “I gave myself a pig nose when my kids were little. It was from leaning into the front window all day, looking for my husband to get home so I could get away.” Everybody laughed, except for my teenage daughter, who was completely horrified by the exchange.

Once outside, I tried to explain that we were not trying to be rude, but that this is the Dutch way of helping someone out: you throw their problem out in the open, and in doing so, you remove the stinger. Unfortunately, my daughter could not appreciate the restorative power of the communal scolding of a toddler. She preferred the Canadian habit of keeping up the ‘front stage/back stage’ ideals of private life. “Why let a total stranger be a dick to your kid?” she asked me – she does enjoy the Dutch tendency to curse. “It is not their place to judge.” Her comments made me think: just because I was so used to certain habits, did that always make them right?

Was there a point where a Dutch mentality was just too Dutch to maintain in my life outside of Amsterdam?

After some serious assimilating on my part, something remarkable happened: I started finding friends in Toronto's bizarre crowd of strangers. First came the doctor who left her husband of fifteen years to pursue a romance with a female bricklayer. She winced whenever I cursed, and I had to get used to her undying love for lip fillers, but our shared sense of humour bridged the gap. Then, I met a woman at U of T, who spent her nights writing raunchy chick lit and dating psychotic lawyers to gain inspiration for said endeavor. On my daily walks with the dog, I was introduced to a decorator well into her seventies, who treats her Maltese like an actual human child, parading him all over Yorkville in a rhinestone covered stroller, and feeding him take-out steak from Morton's. A first-generation immigrant herself, she introduced me to many handy shops, people, and adventures all over town.

All these women were exciting and intelligent and joyful to be around. Their openness to emotion, a foreign concept to me, ultimately brought more depth to our friendships. It made me ashamed that I had been so judgemental of their pattern of speech and the way they dressed. In Toronto, I found a vibrancy and a richness in the tapestry of my social circle that I seemed to have lost in Amsterdam, or perhaps I never had.

Today, I can say that I've found my place in Canada, although simultaneously I am still searching. My internal tension between the two cultures sometimes restrains me like a bra that no longer fits, but it also gives me the freedom to choose which habits to keep, and which to toss. I look for humour and authenticity in my relationships, and these traits seem to be in short supply among certain crowds. Does that give me the right to judge the others, snicker at their clothes, make fun of their accents? Nope. It's so easy to shit on people if they behave differently, but it's usually not the right thing to do. More importantly, it is one thing to hold onto my cultural heritage, and another altogether to be a four-letter c-word.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Third Place Winner
Non-Fiction

AVIATION DNA
© Angela Post

Her eyes brim with memories of past flights and future explorations to foreign lands. I'm sure of this as I stand in front of Amelia Earhart, forever immortalized in bronze. She sits on a park bench with her beloved flight machine behind her, as if she knows it is there but she can't turn to look. She wears tall lace-up boots. Her hair is wind-blown or maybe simply un-brushed. After all, tidy hair is unimportant. Amelia broke free of the constraints for women in her day. Her aviator cap and goggles lay across the corner of the park bench, as though she is merely taking a rest and will soon get back to her round-the-world flight.

Amelia's story lives on at the Museum of Flight in Seattle. I study the map of her round-the-world journey. Amelia and her navigator, Fred Noonan, departed on June 1, 1937 and they completed most of their journey, but their plane disappeared somewhere over the Pacific Ocean, on July 2, 1937. It is possible that they ran out of fuel, or that the radio transmission was faulty, or that it was impossible to tell the island landing spot from the shadows cast by clouds. Amelia, Fred and the aircraft have never been found. Perhaps Amelia's airplane lies beneath the waves much like the Titanic along with all the notes she took for a book that would never be written. Ocean waters hold many secrets.

Amelia was unusual for her time. She was the first woman to complete a solo flight across the Atlantic. She started an organization for female pilots as well as a line of clothing for active women. Amelia was charmed by her first plane ride in 1920. She signed up for flying lessons and bought her first plane in 1921. Aviation and love of flying has a way of taking hold

of some folks and not letting them go. Perhaps it is the sense of curiosity, of adventure, of speeding through the air as a bird, or landing in a foreign place that greets a traveller with humid heavy air scented with plumeria flowers. Maybe it is a calling felt rather than explained.

My dad's brother, Toms, born in 1912, was a test pilot for the Latvian military around the time that the aviation guard was formed in Latvia. He was one of the first to join the aviation unit in the early 1930's. He took part in several festivals of flight. Toms delighted a large group of youth meeting for a Scouts Jamboree. His heart must have soared as he saw hundreds of Scouts, watching in awe as he landed his plane on the amber-kissed sand of Jurmala beach. Many dreams were likely ignited that day. Toms was devoted to flying and sparked many youth toward a curiosity about aviation. One of these youth was my dad, who was eleven years younger than Toms.

In October, 1938, only a year after Amelia had disappeared forever, Toms was engaged in routine flying practice in the Aerodrome in Riga. He had completed several circles when he took a turn to the right and the plane was at an altitude of 200 metres. The aircraft suddenly started to fall for unknown reasons and he was unable to level it. The wooden plane hit the ground with its right wing and flipped over. The plane turned to a pile of rubble and Toms lost his life. My dad, only fifteen years old at the time, recalls a propeller on the coffin and that his older sister sang Ave Maria at the funeral. The Latvian military reported that Toms' bravery, sense of duty, and love for aviation inspired the younger pilots. Toms had just married and he would never meet his yet-to-be born son.

Toms was a contemporary of Amelia and both of them tragically lost their lives in plane accidents. New technology is always risky, but where would humans be today if none of us ever took risks? Airplanes were new during those early decades of development, and these early

pioneers of flight would probably say that they felt more vibrant and alive in an airplane than they ever did on the ground. They might even say that soaring above the earth, as a bird, was the pinnacle of their existence.

John, my father, brought his own love of flying to the Yukon after World War 2. He bought a Cessna long before he purchased a home. One day, sometime in the early 1960's, he flew over the town of Elsa, Yukon, a small hamlet along the Silver Trail. His passenger was taking photos of the town and they flew low to get the best photos. As they passed over my dad's home in the bush, he was unable to get the proper altitude, came too close to the power lines, and just like Amelia, just like Toms, the plane rapidly descended and crashed, but this time, there was no loss of life. Several decades had passed with improvements in safety and construction of aircraft. This Cessna was not made of wood, and my dad did not have to play peek-a-boo with cloud shadows mimicking an island. My father walked away without a scratch, and so did his passenger. To my mom's dismay, my dad never lost his love for Cessna adventures, and she was brought along to many of those, willing or less willing.

I remember flying with my dad in the Yukon, and his windshield became covered with frost as we skipped through some clouds. He grabbed a small scraper and popped the window open. Frigid air blasted in as he ran the scraper back and forth across his windshield, clearing a small patch of window, and that would need to be good enough. We landed safely, or at least I have no memory of not landing safely. My dad often had various snacks in his pocket. Perhaps this was a habit gained working underground in the silver mines. I imagine that as he hopped out of the plane on yet another northern adventure, he might have retrieved a dry crust of rye bread from his shirt pocket, and nibbled on it in satisfaction.

If DNA testing in the future can detect an aviation gene, perhaps it will be noted that my son has inherited this gene. My seventeen year old son has joined the Aircraft Maintenance Engineer program at BCIT to learn how to fix and maintain aircraft. He plans to train to be a commercial pilot after that. A pilot who can also fix his aircraft? Amelia, Toms and John would all have been impressed.

Aviation today would be unrecognizable to pioneer pilots. Commercial flights as we know them today did not exist in the 1930's. In 2021, there were 22 million flights worldwide. In 2019, pre-Covid, there were close to 40 million flights worldwide. Although fear of flying is a barrier for some people, a recent presentation at the Boeing factory in Seattle informed us that there is a higher likelihood of being trampled by a hippo than losing your life in a plane accident.

We as a human species are curious, adventurous, eager to discover new lands and new experiences. Perhaps the wonder in Amelia's eyes is that she marvels at how far humans have come in accessibility of flying for a wide range of people, the speed and size of planes today, the safety, and the potential for average individuals to become round-the-world explorers.

Thank you, Amelia, and thank you, Toms, for being early torch bearers.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023

Honourable Mention Non-Fiction

THE FOUR-COLOUR PEN © Mark LeBourdais

RED

It was an honest mistake. At least, that's how I tried to justify it in my own mind after it all blew up in my face that miserable day in Grade 5. I sat at my desk, blushing deeply as Mrs. Goreski began the day with a furious rant in front of the whole class. I had never seen her so angry before, and the target of her anger was me, along with two other boys, Bobby Levine and Jake Coulson.

“I can't believe what I just heard from our Principal!!” Mrs. Goreski raged, her face almost as red as mine. “Mr. Matheson and I are absolutely *disgusted* by the behaviour of three students in this class - Jake, Bobby, and Sean - who behaved like a vicious pack of wild *ANIMALS* towards another student in this class yesterday after school!! What is *WRONG* with you boys??!! *You're a disgrace to this school!!*” My face burned with humiliation and shame. But as horrible as that day was, the day before had been much, much worse.

I wished with all my heart that I had never bought that Bic 4-Colour pen with my allowance last week, and had never brought it to school to show it off to my friends. But really, this was all Amanda Pritchard's fault. *WHY OH WHY OH WHY* did Amanda have to show up at school yesterday with an identical Bic 4-Colour Pen, exactly *one day* after mine mysteriously went missing??!! How could I not suspect that she had stolen my pen?! And how could I not be

intrigued by my friend Bobby's suggestion that we should try using his cool "Lie Detector" ring that he got for his birthday on Amanda, to find out for sure whether or not she had stolen my pen?! And how could I have known that Jake Coulson, a notorious bully who wasn't even my friend, had overheard us?! How could I have anticipated that Jake would suddenly grab Bobby's Lie-Detector ring, leaving Bobby and me with no choice but to follow him as he ran off shouting, "Let's do it! I bet that dorky freak Amanda stole your pen, and now we can prove it!!"?!

BLUE

Thinking back on it now, I don't know how I allowed things to spiral out of control so quickly. Maybe it was because Amanda was the new girl at our school, whose strange Manchester accent and high-pitched voice made her hard to understand, and made it easier for me to assume that she was morally suspect, and thus capable of theft, or worse. The bottom line was, I didn't like her, so I guess I was willing to let Jake and Bobby take the lead with their half-baked interrogation scheme.

We found her in the deserted stairwell off the main hallway. Bobby ran to block the stairs while I stood in the doorway. "Hey Amanda," said Jake, "Sean here has a question for you. But before you answer, we need to put this ring on your thumb, so we can know if you're telling the truth, okay?" Bobby jumped in to explain. "It's a Lie-Detector ring, and it's never wrong. If you tell a lie while you're wearing it, it will flash red. If you're telling the truth it will flash blue." As Jake reached for her hand, she tried to bolt past us, but Bobby and I pinned her arms and tried to avoid her kicks as Jake struggled to put the ring on her right thumb. "Stop it!! Why are you doing this?? Ow!! You're hurting me!!" she cried.

Once Jake had the ring on Amanda's thumb, Bobby flicked the switch to turn it on, and Jake said, "Did you steal Sean's pen? Yes or no??" "What??" she said. "What are you talking about? I didn't steal anything!" "Yes or no answers only! DID YOU STEAL HIS BIC 4-COLOUR PEN??" yelled Jake, pushing himself right up against her. "No!! I didn't steal his bloody pen! My dad bought mine for me on Saturday. Now get away from me and let me go!!" But the three of us held her pinned against the wall, staring at her thumb, waiting for the red flash which never came. There was no blue flash either. Nothing.

"This was a stupid idea," I said.

"Your Lie-Detector ring sucks, Bobby," said Jake. "It's a useless piece of crap!"

"I don't get it," said Bobby. "It worked perfectly every time before. It should have flashed blue if she was telling the truth."

"I *WAS* telling the truth, you idiots!!" said Amanda. "Now will you please *LET ME GO!!*"

Despite the embarrassing failure of Bobby's plan, I still suspected that Amanda had stolen my pen. But how could I prove it now?

BLACK

I stood there feeling foolish, wondering what to do next, when Jake suddenly grabbed a handful of Amanda's long black hair and yanked her forward until she fell face-first onto the floor between us. She cried out in pain as she landed on her wrist, and started sobbing loudly. Bobby and I were stunned. This was way beyond what either of us had envisioned. But before we could do anything, Jake started screaming at her, kicking her repeatedly as she tried to get up. "You're a filthy LIAR, Amanda!! We all know you stole Sean's pen, and you're not going to get

away with it, you stupid ugly English witch!!” She howled with each kick, crying for Jake to stop, holding her arms up to protect her face.

I stood frozen in shock for far too long, until Amanda’s screams finally sparked me into action - too little, too late. “Jake!!” I yelled. “Stop it!! What are you doing??” I pushed him away from her but he started punching me, so I fell over on top of him, and Bobby jumped on top of me. The three of us rolled around in a tangle of punching arms and kicking legs as poor Amanda lay there wailing on the floor, curled up into a ball, her hair hanging down over her face like a crooked black curtain. She finally managed to stumble, sobbing, out into the hallway, just as Mr. Greaves, the school custodian, came rushing in to find out what the hell was causing all this racket.

GREEN

Amanda never came back to school again after that day. We heard that she had suffered a broken rib, a fractured wrist, multiple bruises, and a cracked tooth. Her family moved back to England a few months later. Even though no one ever said so directly, everyone knew that they had moved back because of what we did to her that day. What I did to her. What I failed to stop Jake from doing to her. I wandered around like a zombie for weeks afterwards, feeling sick and numb inside, trying and failing to make sense of what had happened.

Jake was expelled from school and charged with assault, but for some reason Amanda’s family never pressed charges. Bobby and I were required to do 20 hours each of community service, helping to plant a large “Healing Garden” at the back of the school. Something about using nature and physical labour to help heal the school, and to help us redeem ourselves. A part of me hoped that by planting this beautiful, lush green garden at our school, I might somehow

convince Amanda's family to move back to Canada, and maybe even persuade her to forgive me someday, or at least to let me apologize to her. But another part of me knew that none of these things would ever happen. And despite feeling heartsick with guilt and remorse about what we had done to her, a tiny, defiant part of me still suspected that Amanda had in fact stolen my pen and then lied to us about it.

A few weeks later, I was packing up one day after school when I bumped my backpack into my desk, knocking it over with a loud crash. As I lifted my desk back up, something came clattering out from inside and dropped onto the floor. My mouth agape, I stared down in disbelief at my missing Bic 4-Colour pen. As if in a dream, I picked it up and turned it slowly in my hand, clicking with my thumb each of the four ink colours in turn, as I had done so many times before: red, blue, black, green...red, blue, black, green...

As I gazed down at the pen, which had once been my pride and joy, and which had now become the cause of so much trouble and so much pain, I felt something snap deep inside me, and the colours started to blur together. With a lump in my throat, I stumbled blindly over to the door, flung the pen into the garbage can, and ran out of the room, my chest heaving, my eyes filling with four colours of tears.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023

Honourable Mention Non-Fiction

METAPHORIC © Bill Arnott

I stood on what felt like the edge of the earth. Which it was, in a way. Cusp of terra firma. Beyond, nothing but sea and sky. I'd hiked a hundred miles to get here. Not all at once, but over a staggered series of walks, climbs, and rambles. An undulating coast path written about by countless authors – dreamers, novelists, poets – all equally awed, feeling as though we were seeing this land, these vistas, for the very first time. Undiscovered terrain, irrespective of how many times each of us had passed through. A trap that's ensnared me countless times. Experiencing places, even familiar ones, anew. The magic of exploration through blissfully unjudging eyes.

A red-billed black cough clung to a grassy green slope. Gannets dropped, plummeting into the sea from the sky. And a handful of gulls soared as though posing for canvas, artist and palette unseen. But sensed, and felt. Not merely close but connected. Observer, observing, observed.

What brought me here was, in part, an ongoing saga. One I've written about, off and on, for two decades. Exploring the globe, tracking footsteps of those having passed before, and those yet to pass. Nomadic pursuits. All with a relative purpose, finding gaps in a plot and plugging the holes. Constructing a new mosaic. Tapestry. Underlying stories that inspire it all. Pulling at threads to see where they started. Where they are. Perhaps even where they are going.

The path on the coast, at this point, protrudes from a cliff. A slender footpath of loosely tamped soil kicked into sandstone and granite, narrowing into a bed of dull slate and basalt. Ancient earth, high above timeless sea. Shush of breakers rolling on shore, pulling, pushing, erosion and buildup of continents, a chronometer measuring epochs.

If I'm being honest, I was utterly lost. Hubris, however, coaxed me to confidence. Of course I knew where I was, big picture, what with the ocean and land. The sun more or less

plotting a course, letting me know east from west, subsequent north and south. So, not *lost* lost. But there was no longer any sign of a path. Nor a trail. Or any indication of a directional sign. Just me knowing precisely where I was in the world but without any notion as to how I could, or should, proceed. It was, in a way, a definition of life and its endless array of crossroads.

And so, with an amorphous blend of certainty and not having a clue, I carried on, knowing it would all be okay. Resolution. Perseverance. Resolve. The path not only the vanishing dirt underfoot, but wholly metaphoric as well.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023

Honourable Mention Non-Fiction

THE BUTCHER'S VEGAN DAUGHTER © Natasha Brenko

Growing up in small-town Alberta was nothing short of challenging. The town had three stoplights and a population of just over 5000. It was full of multi-generational families, most of whom were either connected (by blood or marriage) or knew each other, so it proved difficult as the daughter of an immigrant to fit in. My father immigrated to Canada from Eastern Europe in the 1960s. A tall and muscular man with a strong accent, he had an intimidating presence.

While some got to know him, most only saw him driving through town with legs and hooves bouncing along the top of the box of his truck, the rest of what lay under the tarp left to the imagination.

It was hard for me to make friends in this little town, as I never fit into either side that I felt divided the town—those who worked on their families' farm, cleaning stalls, inseminating cows, calving, branding and castrating young animals, who raised and sold their own animals for slaughter through the 4-H program, and those whose meat came wrapped in neat little cellophane packages from the grocery store. One side saw animals as a commodity, while the other was blissfully unaware of what it took to get the steak on their plate.

As a youngster, some of the things I saw are what nightmares are made of. It is quite a dichotomy to know in the depths of your being that what you see is wrong, yet, it is treated as perfectly *normal*.

I tried to find where I fit, but quickly realized I wasn't a farm kid at heart and never would be, but I wasn't like the other town kids either. I was just the weirdo who helped out in my dad's butcher shop on the weekends. The one who squeegeed gelatinous blood from the kill floor to the drain, and who would have bits of bone and ground meat stuck to my hair after pressure washing and cleaning up the cutting room tables and meat grinder.

I was the one who had to gut a cow that a farmer brought in when my dad was out. The conflict I felt within was soul-crushing. I knew the dangers of the meat becoming contaminated if the cow was not hung, bled and gutted quickly after death. As the clock ticked, with my dad yet to arrive from his latest butcher, I felt the pressure of what needed to be done. The cow had broken her leg, so the farmer had taken it upon himself to shoot her on his farm and bring her in, but didn't want to bleed or gut her himself and was looking to 14-year-old me to do it before he lost all of the meat. The pressure to not let my father down was immense.

But I struggled. It felt so wrong to reach inside a being, feel the warmth that had not yet left her insides, feel the slick, smoothness of her innards as they slid from the cut down the middle of her stomach and landed on the floor with a wet thud.

What 14-year-old wants to hang out with someone who has to do that on Saturday afternoons?

As I desperately tried to fit in somewhere, I kept building taller and thicker walls around myself. Defensiveness became my go-to mechanism of protection that I wrapped around my heart as I tucked it away, deeper and deeper.

The spring that I turned 16, we pastured ten longhorns on our acreage. Every day after school, as I got off the bus and walked up the long driveway that separated our house and the butcher shop, one of the longhorns (who I lovingly, but-not-very-creatively named Blackie due to his all-black fur) would trot up to the fence to greet me. The other longhorns were standoffish, but Blackie and I had a connection. He wordlessly begged me to pet his snout, scratch his back, and caress his soft ears. Just like a puppy, he'd nuzzle his soft, wet nose into my hand if I dared stop.

One evening, I sat down at the dinner table, and as I had so many times before, (unsuccessfully) decided to speak my truth. I loudly and proudly declared, "Mom, Dad, I'm going to be vegetarian! I will no longer eat meat!" Desperately hoping to receive respect for and acceptance of my true-to-self decision, I was, yet again, defeated as my dad looked me in the eyes and began to laugh. The door to the vault that held the essence of my being slammed shut as my dad grabbed a steak from the cast iron pan in the middle of the table and dropped it on my plate. "You're not going to be vegetarian. Here's your steak. It's Blackie."

And that was it—the moment a part of my soul relented as my heart hardened a little more. I went into emotional survival mode.

Fast forward 24 years. I was eight weeks pregnant and on vacation with my husband, father-in-law and 4-year-old son in Hawaii. On our way to the Airbnb, we stopped at Costco to stock up on groceries. Having grown up in meat-centric homes, we bought the largest package of ground beef we could find, planning to make tacos, hamburgers and spaghetti. But, as I began preparing dinner on the second night, I became ill. As I opened the ground beef, the smell of flesh hit me harder than ever, and I had to leave the room. My husband offered to cook dinner, but the smell of the flesh cooking was even worse, and I had to leave the condo. Overnight, I developed a severe aversion to red meat. As the months progressed, my aversion to all animal proteins increased. Next to go was pork, chicken, then fish.

I suddenly found myself in a position where I needed to learn how to cook without basing my meals solely on animal protein. With a young child and another on the way, nutrition was at the forefront of my mind. So, I did what any modern mom would do, and made my way to Google! Suddenly, a new world of possibilities and flavours opened up, and I was hooked. My husband and son loved 99% of the new recipes we tried and, before we knew it, we were a vegetarian family.

Fast forward a few more months. One evening as I nursed my newborn, I was scrolling on my phone to stay awake, and I came across a post about a former dairy farmer turned vegan. Tears streamed down my face as I read her account of hearing the mother cows bellow for days after their new calves had been ripped away from them. The former farmer described listening to their sorrow as she sat nursing her very own newborn baby and how she could hear the despair in their cries. She said that moment changed her, as she realized she could no longer be part of such an industry; one that would tear apart mother and child so that the milk meant for that baby could be consumed by humans. I sobbed as I imagined the mother cows yearning for their young.

As she was transformed by the experience, so was I, simply from reading her account. A small crack appeared in the walls I had built, and as it grew, my heart slowly revealed what it had been trying to show me all of those decades before. The true essence of who I am, who I was, and who I have always been. The compassionate, empathetic being who doesn't see the physical or intellectual differences that separate all sentient beings. I only see the will to live, love, and be at peace.

Gone are the worries and cares about what anyone else thinks of me, or how I live my life. I know in my soul that I am being true to myself and not hurting others in the process.

But I have one regret. That I hadn't been true to myself sooner and that I let others dictate what I should think, feel, and do. When I told my dad that I was vegan, I had steeled myself for his response but was caught off-guard by his reaction. While not showing complete understanding, I felt he at least respected me for it. I know as he got older and closer to his end, he also started opening up his heart. I can only imagine the amount of stone that surrounded his heart from years of doing a job that involved taking numerous lives. It couldn't have been easy, and anyone who does the job must have to put up the tallest and strongest walls to get through it day by day.

My dad passed away just over three years ago, and I am finally starting to understand what he must have struggled with. I no longer see an uncaring, intimidating man but rather a wounded soul who did what he had to do to survive and get by as an immigrant in a new country. He took on the job that most others would adamantly refuse to do, despite reaping the benefit of being able to enjoy those neatly-wrapped packages of meat.

Non-Fiction Winners & Honourable Mentions



Lesley Hebert immigrated from the U.K. in the late sixties when the British music invasion met the hippie peace and love movement on the northwest Pacific Coast. She lives in New Westminster with a sociable husband and an anti-social cat. She teaches English to international students online and writes web content, travel articles, short stories and poetry. She took third place in the *Beyond Words* 2020 summer creative writing challenge. Her work has also appeared

in *Shared Vision*, *Canadian Stories*, travelthruhistory.com, *The First Line*, *A Poetry of Place: Journeys Across New Westminster*, *Pocket Lint*, *Parabola*, and *Immigration Diaries*.



Kimberley Smart grew up in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, before moving to Canada in 2020. She is endlessly fascinated by people and their quirks, so she spends her days writing about them. Her fiction has been longlisted for the Pulp Literature Hummingbird Prize. She divides her time between Toronto and Vancouver Island, where she's currently working on her first novel.



Angela Post dreamed of being a flight attendant to travel the world and somehow ended up as a psychologist to explore the territory of the human mind. The love of aviation is hard to shake off however, once it enters the family bloodline and may pass to future generations. Angela writes fiction and nonfiction stories. She has been long-listed in the Canada Writes non-fiction prize, she was chosen as a winner in the Surrey International Writers Conference Story Tellers contest, and she had a winning non-fiction story in the RCLAS Write On contest.

2023 RCLAS Write On! Contest

Non-Fiction Winners & Honourable Mentions



In addition to being a relative newcomer to the committed practice of the craft of writing, **Mark LeBourdais** is also a teacher, a parent, and a musician. He comes from a long line of writers, and has successfully avoided following in their footsteps for most of his life. Until now.



Bill Arnott is the bestselling author of the *Gone Viking* travel memoirs and *A Season on Vancouver Island*. He's been awarded for prose, poetry, songwriting, and for his expeditions received a Fellowship at London's Royal Geographical Society. When not trekking with a small pack and journal, armed with his laughably outdated camera phone or showing off cooking skills as a culinary school dropout, Bill can be found on Canada's west coast, where he lives near the sea on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh land. Find Bill at his website or with his #GoneVikingCommunity.



Natasha Brenko is a writer and editor living in Kelowna, BC, with her husband, two children, and two rescue dogs. When she's not helping with homework, packing school lunches, or making sure said lunches aren't stolen off the counter by the four-legged family members, you will find her reading, camping, or skiing. One of her proudest accomplishments is authoring five biographies for Scholastic Teachables. She studied editing at Simon Fraser University, has one published children's book, *Teddy the Helpful Ladybug*, another in the editing stage, and is currently working on her memoir, *The Butcher's Vegan Daughter*.

2023 WRITE ON! CONTEST

COMMENTS FROM OUR NON-FICTION JUDGE KARIN HEDETNIEMI



NON-FICTION WINNERS

Non-Fiction First Place: LESLEY HEBERT – *THE SPIDERS*

Non-Fiction Second Place: Kimberley Smart – *Cultural Criminal*

Non-Fiction Third Place: Angela Post – *Aviation DNA*

Non-Fiction Honourable Mentions

Mark LeBourdais – *The Four-Colour Pen*

Bill Arnott – *Metaphoric*

Natasha Brenko – *The Butcher's Vegan Daughter*

First Place *The Spiders* by Lesley Hebert

A travel memoir capturing a day in the life at the seaside village of Tateyama, Japan, where long spiderwebs sway in the breeze between telephone poles. The narrator, studying the Japanese language, lives with their hosts Michiko and Yoshi. I appreciated the author's keen observations and delightful imagery: "two-inch long eyebrow hairs waved in the breeze like spider legs." A meditative experience and an effective character study told through simple actions: Yoshi patiently smoking eggs on the stove; Michiko methodically rolling down storm shutters as a typhoon approaches. A memorable, transportive story that stood out for me, befriendng both the village spiders and the heart of this reader.

Second Place *Cultural Criminal* by Kimberley Smart

This story offers a humorous look at the cultural differences between the Dutch and the Canadian, or more specifically, the inhabitants of two iconic world cities: Amsterdam and Toronto. The author pokes fun at their own innate Dutch coarseness as an initial misfit among the dressy "multicoloured birds of paradise." Part of our human condition is to

seek acceptance and belonging wherever we may live. This is a story of reconciling tensions and discovering depth to new friendships by opening emotions. I enjoyed the author's unique voice and cheeky wit in this most enjoyable reflection.

Third Place *Aviation DNA* by Angela Post

Part memoir, part education, linking the story of Amelia Earhart and her pioneering aviation spirit, first to the author's family military service legacies, then to the author's own childhood memories, soaring over the Yukon landscape in their father's beloved Cessna. I appreciated the engaging, seamless transitions, making the history of flight personalized and accessible. The author muses: is there an aviation gene? "Maybe it is a calling felt rather than explained." My mind took flight through the author's gifted writing gene. Thank you for an inspiring story.





**11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry Winners & Honourable Mentions**

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry First Place Winner

Hannah Siden

After Portia

I was too young, perhaps

When I saw that production of *Julius Caesar*

I don't remember
The language

The complexities of syntax and simile
The counting of syllables

I remember the silences

Portia in the kitchen, she
Waits for Brutus

Midnight

The porch door left open sings

A soft creak
Into pitch black

Emptiness beyond her empty nest

I remember the argument
Not the words

Slam bounce of the screen door, he's
Home then gone

She begs, says
I don't remember what, but

I know the void she sees

The fire she tries to bring to the night

The theatre his world, entirely
Shrouded as she

Grasps at illusion, as he

Leaves her to the sounds of the crickets
Soft and dark and alone

I remember – the catch of her breath, and

The quiet swallow

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry Second Place Winner

Ford Weisberg

If the time from birth is just *diapers*

to diapers, then dust
to the rest, we'll hear not—before

and after—the notes of our non
being, paused so briefly by this

life. Responsible for this
display of tacet sound, the comets'

composer—hat slung
over a star—croons an

inaudible song without beginning,
end, with

rests during our measly, if
lively, cadenza. To Him, his

eons and ever greater
retinue, I incline the plume from my own

chapeau, and
wonder at the invite

to his *Café*
Concert.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry Third Place Winner

Angelle McDougall

The Collective

Women stand together
in the industrial kitchen
of the community hall
rolling meatballs, peeling potatoes
and pinching pierogi
while debating the best method
for souring cabbage heads and leaves

Like an extension of the harvester
sitting behind the building
they function as one
intergenerational machine
Younger parts in training
to replace older parts rusted
by arthritis and creaky joints
in constant need of grease

Grandma watches daughter
teach granddaughter
to scoop spoonfuls of rice
into pale green leaves
tuck the snug bundles
into cozy rows that fill
the roaster to overflowing

Each member contributes her skills
to prepare tomorrow's feast
Every recipe remembered
each role well practiced
words are unnecessary
to complete the task

Instead they discuss
latest births and deaths
how to raise children and care
for home and garden
with the occasional rumination
about the usefulness of husbands

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry Honourable Mention

Chelsea Comeau

Recital

When I was in the first grade,
my teacher French braided my hair so tight
the plaits curled up at the ends.
She fed me a homemade lunch her husband sent
in Tupperware stained pink by canned tomatoes.
I wore my favourite denim dress
with small pink flowers embroidered on the sleeves,
sat straight-backed filling my mouth
until it hummed with spice.
My teacher's fingers tangled in my curls.
I was a good girl then, too polite
to tell anyone what hurt.
The braids pulled and pulled my hairline.
I saw stars explode behind my eyes.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry Honourable Mention

Diana Hayes

Looking in the Margins

Where have I been these mornings
scouting stones, tracing maps

not by the den's cozy hearth
lit up and slow-burning—

memory of an old shake roof under moss
this journal's sleight-of-hand

amulets and antlers on the mantel
another day awash in the scent of cedar

old Leechtown where I waded in a dream
sipped cool water in the margins

the bowl's rim and my thirst attuned
an ouzel's burbling medley of song

water-walker with feathered oars
diver on the brink of a stream

the old trestle's coordinates lost
heavy with nostalgia and the scent of gorse—

Oh sleep, come back to the roost
I am all fog falling beyond the water.

11th Annual RCLAS Write On! Contest 2023
Poetry Honourable Mention

Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews

Toast, snow

Snow day
The roads unserviceable.
Snug in the darkness
Of this early hour
As everyone still sleeps,
The world feels only mine.
I breathe in the good scent
Of toast from the silver toaster, Sweet burn of milk
Spilling on the element.
I pour myself a cup
Of coffee. Hot sun in my hands. Behind the frozen glass
Of the kitchen window, snow
Is falling heavy and thick,
A pillow-like quilt on the yard Morphing the boxwoods
To frosted mint gumdrops
And the stone benches
To slabs of bridal cake.
Safe from the door's icy draft,
On the mat, orange-white fibonacci All purr and heaving fur,
The cat stretches his long pink paws. I love this snow descending. January's smug glory.
This morning I will not pine
For spring, the warmth
Of my house delight enough,
As winter's silver factories
Send down their white
Parcels of silence.

Poetry Winners & Honourable Mentions



Hannah Siden is a writer and filmmaker. Her poetry is published or forthcoming in The League of Canadian Poets, Bed Zine, Metatron Press and elsewhere. She recently won the 2023 RCLAS Write On! Poetry Contest and was 2nd Runner Up for PRISM International's Grouse Grind Lit Prize, as well as an honourable mention for the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto Foundation Poetry Award. She lives on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations (Vancouver, BC) with her partner, and cat (Lil Monster).

Find her on Twitter @hannah_siden or at <https://www.hannahsiden.com>.



Ford Weisberg is a poet located in Ladner, B.C. He has spent a lifetime in the arts, first concertizing on wind instruments in Early Music, as well as on tinwhistle and flute in traditional Irish music. After years as a photographer and digital painter, Ford turned to poetry in 2014 after his wife (now deceased) was diagnosed with cancer. He is a member of the writing group Ramapough Poets, and holds a certificate in poetry from The Writer's Studio Online of Simon Fraser University.



Angelle McDougall is neurodivergent and a dedicated world traveler, retired college instructor, slow-food advocate, mother of two adult sons, a graduate of The Writers Studio at Simon Fraser University (2022), and loom-knitting aficionado. Angelle lives in Edmonton, Alberta, and writes poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction. She also enjoys chronicling the fantastic adventures shared with her author husband on their travels.

Poetry Winners & Honourable Mentions



Chelsea Comeau is a freelance writer and editor whose work has appeared in CV2, SubTerrain, Room, and other Canadian literary magazines.



Diana Hayes was born in Toronto and has lived on the east and west coasts of Canada. She has seven published poetry books, including her newly released *Sapphire and the Hollow Bone* (Ekstasis Editions), *Gold in the Shadow* (Rainbow Publishers), *Labyrinth of Green* (Plumleaf Press), and *This is the Moon's Work: New and Selected Poems* (Mother Tongue Publishing). A new chapbook, *Language of Light* was published by House of Appleton in 2023. In 2019 she launched Raven Chapbooks and publishes small edition poetry chapbooks by B.C. poets. Salt Spring Island has been home since 1981. www.dianahayes.ca



Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews has written seven collections of poetry and two non-fiction books. Her work appears in various journals and anthologies among which: *Canadian Literature*, *The Malahat Review*, *Descant*, *The Canada Literary Review*, *Canadian Poetry Review*, among others. Her poetry has recently won an international poetry prize in Rome's Citta Del Galateo Contest. As well, her poem "The First Time I Heard Leonard Cohen" was nominated for the 2022 Pushcart Prize. Her latest book of poems, *Meta Stasis*, was released in June 2021 by Mosaic Press. Josie is a member of The League of Canadian Poets and the Ontario Poetry Society.

2023 WRITE ON! CONTEST
COMMENTS FROM OUR POETRY JUDGE
JESSICA LEE MCMILLAN



POETRY WINNERS

Poetry First Place: HANNAH SIDEN – AFTER PORTIA

Poetry Second Place: Ford Weisberg –

If the time from birth is just diapers

Poetry Third Place: Angelle McDougall – The Collective

Poetry Honourable Mentions

Chelsea Comeau – *Recital*

Diana Hayes – *Looking in the Margins*

Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews – *Toast, Snow*

First Place *AFTER PORTIA* by HANNAH SIDEN

"After Portia" is a memorable and formally sophisticated poem that successfully combines lyric elements from the speaker's memory with the plot of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. The poem renders a political play into a narrative of personal, existential crisis as the speaker moves from innocence ("too young") to experience ("empty nest"). The thoughtful and intentioned spacing of the poem gives it a consistent, slightly breathless pace while mirroring the speaker/Portia's isolation all the way to the affecting end. The speaker's perspective is brilliantly articulated with the line "I remember the silences," thereby creating a framework for the whole poem with each line built around silence. "After Portia", however, works in silences as much as it is declarative. The poem is also a self-conscious meta-commentary on the play in its references to language (syntax, simile, syllables) and through the speaker's direct comments about the characters ("I know...the fire she tries to bring to the night"). The speaker is confident about their overall emotion of the play, despite forgetting "the language". The combination of silence and the speaker's dream-like memories add to the poem's liminal, disembodied quality, as do the images of the swinging door and the shroud, which both obscures Portia's view of the world and foreshadows her death.

"After Portia" could have easily succumbed to literary abstraction, but the writer skillfully situates the reader in the speaker's observations of the stage version. The speaker identifies with the argument between Brutus and Portia in the play and it is here that we also get the modern Shakespeare where Brutus slam-bounces the porch door (proving Johnson's contention that Shakespeare's characters are universal and timeless). The speaker thereby recreates a contemporary, domestic scene and gives us a window into their own disillusion ("I know the void she sees"). The void is realized by effective use of language like the "soft creak" of the door "into pitch black". The poem's final lines conjure T.S. Eliot's whimper in "The Wasteland" but rather with "catch of [Portia's] breath". We circle back to the haunting title and the imagined silence "after Portia" giving the poem a lasting chill.

Second Place *If the time from birth is just diapers* by Ford Weisberg

This poem has great energy that continues directly from the title with the central image of tipping the hat to "the comets' composer". The speaker recognizes a cosmic order greater than themselves which simultaneously becomes a reckoning with death. They ponder the vastness of time for which we don't exist against our brief lives through musical language that sings within the lines. No word is wasted in this poem and the spare lines against the white space formally mimic this concept of the vast against the brief. The rhythm and flow of carefully enjambed lines and sonorous inner rhymes like "croons," "retinue" and "plume" warm us in a lullaby, despite the poem's mournful undertones. With observations akin to Hamlet ("there are more things that heaven and earth...") the vastness of non-being is the greater song that is "paused so briefly" by our brief lives.

A highly original concept poem, "if the time from birth..." then compares the eternal/creator to a more familiar picture of a crooner with his "hat slung over a star" and one can almost hear Sinatra intone "Would You Like to Swing on a Star". The poet continues to employ music to frame big questions of existence from the cadenza to the "Café Concert". There is something more intimate happening in the final thought of "café" as though it is an invitation to a smoky jazz den rather than the great gig in the sky. It suggests the speaker moves from a feeling of insignificance to acceptance. I like how this sets up a contrast between great and small, while also bringing the creator closer to humanity by personifying them as a crooner. The complexity of this poem culminates with the speaker's wonderment that their invitation is both a death and a unification with the great concert.

Third Place *The Collective* by Angelle McDougall

The heart of this poem is togetherness. From the assertive first line "women stand together" we are given a clear picture of setting where multiple generations gather as extensions of a greater whole. In this narrative of solidarity, the women work together with such harmony that "words are unnecessary". "The Collective" is composed in tight stanzas that use active language, seamlessly taking us from the immediate setting of an industrial kitchen to broader settings of the yard, and the lives of those in the community. The poem's greatest strength is how it expresses the mechanical efficiency of the assembly line, of how "younger parts in training" and older parts rusted" work toward something that is collectively more profound.

"The Collective" is a celebration and by the time we reach the third stanza's delectable, sensory details (and accompanying inner rhymes) we are tucked into a sense of abundance and comfort. The women, the poem and the poet take a moment from strife to focus on togetherness—"on tomorrow's feast"—even though the idea of struggle is not far behind in the allusion to births and deaths. The poet has skillfully given us a timeless picture that hints at struggle while making the decision to follow an optimistic trajectory. This is made all too clear in the decision to end the image of the women's topic of discussion taking an unexpected and humorous twist.

Poetry Honourable Mentions: I was deeply honoured to read all the entries and thank every poet who submitted for their heart, their vulnerability, darknesses, hope and poetic vision in transforming the everyday into magic. Into healing. The selection process was a heart-rendering challenge and many more poems came close than those reflected here. I read through many stories of trauma, grief, celebration and affirmation and directly witnessed how this community shares an incredible desire to be part of something bigger and to dedicate themselves to their craft. To me, the submissions became audible voices of the community and I cried, laughed and was intellectually tickled through it all.

The following Honourable Mentions particularly struck me with their formal integrity, clear image/subject as well as powerful and surprising use of language, sensory details and rich metaphor:

Recital by Chelsea Comeau

2023 RCLAS Write On! Contest Judges



Jessica Lee McMillan is a poet, teacher and civil servant with a Masters in English. She is currently taking SFU's The Writer's Studio program for 2022-2023. Read her in the *Humber Literary Review*, *Train Poetry Journal*, *SORTES*, *Gap Riot Press*, *Blank Spaces Magazine*, *Tiny Spoon*, *Pinhole Poetry* and others. Her first chapbook is coming in 2023 through *Rose Garden Press*. She has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and once for Best of the Net. She is a proud member of RCLAS and associate member of The League of Canadian Poets.



Marlet Ashley, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., After earning an M.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing at the U. of Windsor, she taught creative writing there as a sessional instructor. Moving to Vancouver, B.C. she was a tenured instructor of literature and composition at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey, B.C. Her publications include a novel, *The Right Kind of Crazy* (2018); travelogue picture books *Crumbles do Skye* and *Crumbles do Paris*; and seven children's books in the *Revelry on the Estuary Series*. She facilitates a fiction writing group, The Group of Glacier Writers, who have published a collection of short stories *Re-Collections* (2021). She was a finalist for the 2012 John Kenneth Galbraith Literary Award, won honourable mention in the Lorian Hemmingway 2018 Short Story

Competition and in the 2020 *Writers' Digest* Literary Short Fiction Contest. Two of her stories were published in *Canadian Stories* recently, "Scars" receiving honourable mention, and she has placed first in the 2022 Royal City Literary Arts Society's Write On! fiction contest for her short story "Design." Marlet lives with her husband, artist Pieter Molenaar, in Comox, BC.



Karin Hedetniemi is a writer, traveller, and photographer from Victoria, the ancestral lands of the Lekwungen Songhees. Her nature and place-inspired memoir, images, and poetry are published in *Lunch Ticket*, *Prairie Fire*, *Hinterland*, *The London Reader*, *Parentheses*, *CutBank*, *EVENT*, and many other literary journals. In 2020, Karin won the nonfiction contest from the Royal City Literary Arts Society. Her cover art appears on *Pithead Chapel*, *3Elements Review*, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. Between adventures, Karin stewards a free little free library, and shares her creative work at AGoldenHour.com.

POETRY IN THE PARK Write on Contest Night

L to R: Janet Kvammen, Carol Johnson, Angela Kenyon, Hannah Siden,
Iulia Sîncrăian, Ford Weisberg, Jessica Lee McMillan.



July 19, 2023

Royal City
Literary Arts
Society



October 1 - Cogswell Award - Deadline for Submissions

October 14/15 - New West Cultural Crawl Weekend

October 15 - Poetic Justice Special Edition featuring Alan Hill, Jessica McMillan and Aidan Chafe

October 17 - Wordplay with Alan Hill - Space is Limited - RSVP if interested.

October **IN THEIR WORDS** with Host Ruth Kozak - DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON
Featuring Lesley Hebert (Poe) & Julia Chayko (Anne Rivers Siddons)

November 5 - Poetic Justice ONLINE Sylvia Taylor & Joyce Goodwin/ Open Mic

November 21 - Wordplay with Alan Hill - Space is Limited - RSVP if interested.

Watch for workshop announcements,
Cogswell Award news, Holiday social,
and MORE.

Fall/Winter programming is in the works.

Psssst: Save the Date: Sun Nov 26 reading event

www.rclas.com



Poetic Justice Special Edition

Date: Sunday OCT 15, 2023

Time: 2:30pm to 4:30pm

Featuring Poets:

Alan Hill

Jessica Lee McMillan

Aidan Chafe



Open Mic sign-up starts at 2:15 pm

LOCATION:

Groove Cat Books and Records

775 6th Street, New Westminster, BC

Phone: 604-553-0929



Alan Hill was born in the UK and immigrated to Canada in 2005. He is the former Poet Laureate of the City of New Westminster, BC (2017-2020), and a former president of the Royal City Literary Arts Society. He was the editor and curator of *A Poetry of Place: Journeys Across New Westminster*, published in partnership with New Westminster Arts Services. His writing has been published internationally and his poetry has appeared in *Event*, *CV2*, *Canadian Literature*, *The Antigonish Review*, *subTerrain*, *Poetry is Dead*, among others. His book *In the Blood* was published by Caitlin Press in 2022.



Jessica Lee McMillan is poet and essayist with an English MA and Certificate in Creative Writing from SFU's The Writer's Studio. Her writing has appeared in over 30 publications across Canada and the US, including *The Humber Literary Review*, *Train Poetry Journal*, *Pinhole Poetry*, *GAP RIOT Press*, *Blank Spaces*, *Rogue Agent Journal* and *Rose Garden Press* (forthcoming). Jessica is completing her first poetry collection. She lives on the unceded, traditional territories of Halkomelem-speaking Peoples (New Westminster, BC) with her little family and large dog. More at: jessicaleemcmillan.com.



Aidan Chafe is the author of *Gospel Drunk* and *Short Histories of Light*, which was longlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. His poems have appeared in numerous publications, including *CV2*, *EVENT*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Maudlin House* and *Prism international*. He lives on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples (Vancouver, BC).

RCLAS Members Open Call for Submissions

Email Word Doc to janetkvammen@rclas.com

Halloween ---Haunted Special Feature--- Deadline Oct 15, 2023

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We have a Group on Facebook too
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Oh come on, you know you want to!

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Contact:
janetkvammen@rclas.com
RCLAS President

Janet Kvammen
Design