

Wilfrid Laurier University



Contacts: Julia Ann Easley
WLU Information Officer
(519) 884-1970 ext. 2070

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Susan Mayse
Author
(604) 336-2708 (Sept. 10-30)

Book on B.C. mining activist "Ginger" wins university writing contest

A book about British Columbian union organizer Albert "Ginger" Goodwin has won the first annual Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-Fiction. *Ginger: The Life and Death of Albert Goodwin* was written by fourth-generation Vancouver Islander Susan Mayse and published in 1990 by Harbour Publishing of Madeira Park.

The \$3,000 award is given for a piece of published writing of at least 2,500 words, distinguished by first-hand research, well-crafted interpretative writing, the writer's personal experience and discovery, and a Canadian location and significance.

Administered by Wilfrid Laurier University, the award was endowed by Edna Staebler, a creative writer and cookbook author, to give acknowledgement and encouragement to new writers.

Ginger is the story of Goodwin, a young English immigrant who arrived on Vancouver Island in 1910 to join hundreds of others slaving in the hellholes of the Cumberland mines. What he saw there made him one of the most effective labor leaders the province has ever seen, and led ultimately to his untimely end.

Goodwin played a minor role in the strike of 1912 when his fledgling local of the United Mine Workers of America "downed tools" and precipitated "one of Canada's longest, most expensive and most rancorous labor actions." Later as an officer of the Trail Mill and Smeltermen's Union, he took on the management of Consolidated Mining

and Smelting Company of Canada Ltd. in an "uncompromising and pugnacious" manner. **In** 1917 he demanded a universal eight-hour work day but the resulting strike failed to win the change.

Mayse speculates that Goodwin may have been the target of "shoot to kill" orders; that his reputation as a troublesome and powerful labor organizer was enough to get him first denied a draft exemption — despite his poor health; then, when he evaded call-up, a death sentence.

Sought by Dominion Police and trackers as a deserter from the army, Goodwin was shot in the woods near Comox Lake; there is still controversy about the circumstances of the shooting.

"I'm really delighted that the judges saw the broader implications of Ginger Goodwin's story," Mayse said in an interview. "I'm really pleased that people are seeing the importance of these minor keys in Canadian history."

In the book, Mayse writes that labor history and other unofficial histories rank low. "Working people can choose to perpetuate the official history . . . or to challenge it. This is our history as working people. If we want it on record — not just the patronizing and distorted views of the privileged — we must speak out."

Although she had been researching Goodwin since the early '80s, *Ginger* grew from a CBC radio documentary she wrote in 1989. Feeling almost "drawn in against her will," Mayse interviewed dozens of people for the book and used tax rolls, old newspapers, labor history files, official archives, and records of the United Mine Workers of America and coal mining towns.

Mayse returned to B.C. two years ago after having spent 16 years in Edmonton and some time in the North West Territories. Her family is from the mining communities of Yorkshire and, in fact, lived about 30 kilometres from Goodwin's.

Mayse began writing at 14 when she reviewed juvenile books for a local paper and kept them as her payment. She also wrote for the University of Victoria's student newspaper and other student literary publications.

Her prior works include *Merlin's Web*, a political thriller about the possibility of terrorism in Wales in the near future. It was a runner-up in the Crime Writers' Association of Canada's first novel contest in 1988. She has also written radio dramas.

In November, Lone Pine Press is scheduled to release Mayse's most recent work, *The Big One: An Earthquake Survival Guide*. She has also written an unpublished novel about the building of Offa's Dike on the border between England and Wales in the eighth century.

There were 31 books and 10 articles entered in this year's contest. A preliminary jury of five from Wilfrid Laurier University considered all the submissions and the winner was selected from its short list by Pierre Berton; Sandra Woolfrey, director of Wilfrid Laurier University Press; and writer Carroll Allen.

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Note: To request a review copy of *Ginger*, contact the publisher at (604) 883-2730.