

Lifestyles

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Interest in family history sparks second career for author

by Penny Thompson

The desire to learn more about her own family history led to a second career for Connie Brummel Crook—writing historical novels for young adults.

Connie grew up in the Norwood area and taught school in Peterborough, however, the search for her family's roots led her to the Belleville Public Library

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and the Hastings Historical Society records which were kept there. Learning she was a descendant of John W. Meyers, one of Belleville's founding fathers, she decided to weave her own family story into a book about the Loyalists who settled in the Quinte area. A decade later, with a dozen or so books published or in progress, she returned to the Belleville Public Library to talk to senior elementary school students.

"I'd been teaching kids to write for 30 years," she explained. "I thought it was time I wrote something myself. But I didn't have the time to do it until I retired."

Her first book, *Flight*, is the story of a Loyalist family and is largely based on her own family history.

"For the most part all my books are dramatized biography," she says.

It took some perseverance too, as Connie struggled to become a published author.

"I had to rewrite my first book three times," she said. "That was a lot of rewriting and I was doing it all longhand then."

It was three years before her first book was published. She taught herself to write using a computer and after that things became easier. Later books include *Meyer's Creek*, *Maple Moon*, *Laura's Brave Walk* (based on Laura Secord) and the *Nellie McClung Trilogy*. They are used extensively to introduce students to Canadian history. In fact, Connie offers free study guides for teachers for use in Grade 6, 7 and 8 classrooms.

Connie's research has taken her far beyond her own family history. For example when writing *Maple Moon* she spent a lot of time researching and talking to native people. But she says the *Nellie McClung* trilogy was the most difficult.

"It's always harder when it's not your own family," she explains. "Nellie has a lot of descendants and I didn't want to be criticized. I wanted to be very accurate."

In her latest book, *The Hungry Years*, she returns to events in the Quinte area during a time when the British did not receive supplies from abroad.

"It's set in the Hay Bay area," she says. "It's about a fictional family but all the events in the story happened to real families at that time."

It was evident from the interest shown by the students and the many questions they asked that most were familiar with Connie Brummel Crook's books. There wasn't enough time to answer all their questions so Connie suggested they visit her new website <www.conniebrummelcrook.com>.



Connie Brummel Crook signed copies of her books for a few lucky students.

