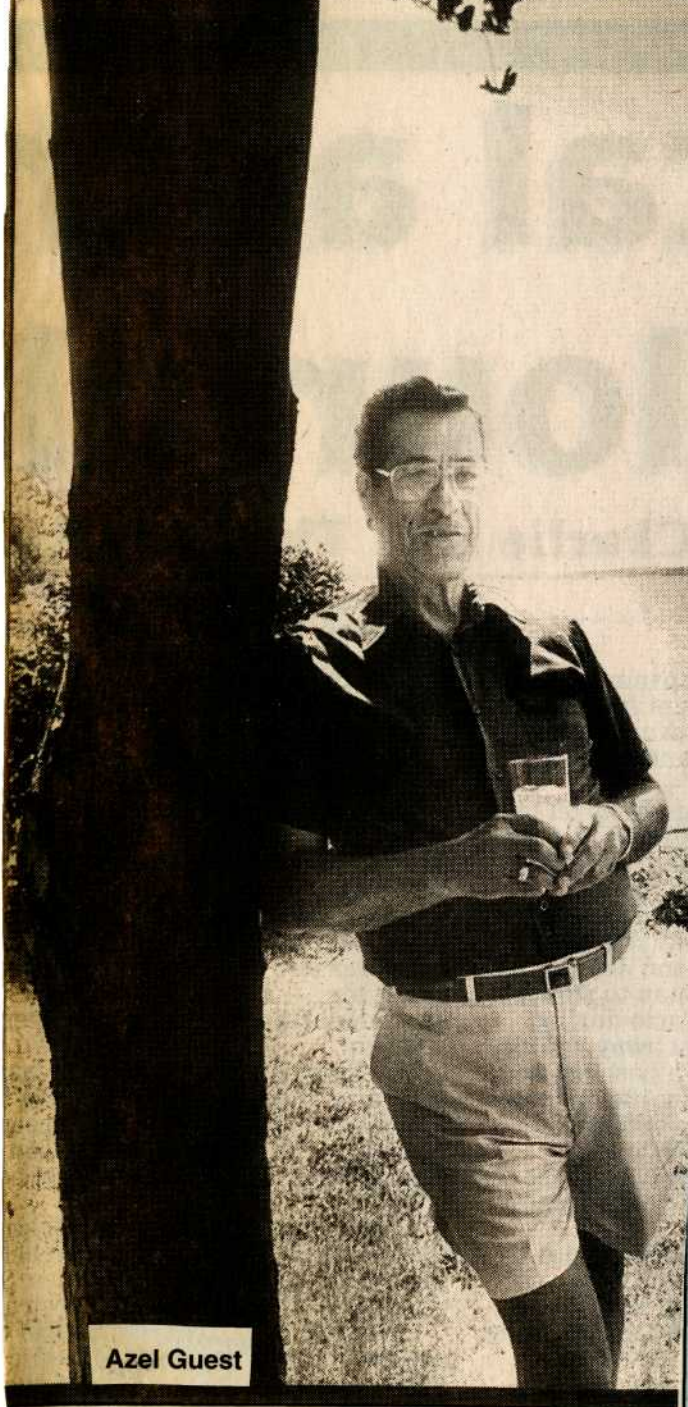


Stories of

Guest, Azel

a small town



Azel Guest

EAST LAKE — Azel Guest says he only had the urge to write one book: but it took more than 12 years to complete.

The 79-year-old Picton resident has just finished the final version of "Strong Like the Mountain", a touching and often humorous story detailing Guest's idyllic boyhood in Picton during the 1920s and '30s.

"It's a book that appeals to people both in and outside of Prince Edward County," said the genteel Guest, sipping lemonade at his summer cottage overlooking East Lake. "Although the stories take place in Picton, they have a small-town quality that could be any location in Canada during that era."

Guest's first name is actually Hebrew for 'strong like the mountain', and he tells an amusing story about his mother, a very religious woman, and how she gave him the name, in the introduction to the book:

"And on the 14th day Mother spoke unto God saying 'his name shall be Azel, which in the early Hebrew means strong like the mountain. And God answered, saying 'Oh, all right!'"

It's ironic that a book revised several times and now in its final printing — Guest designed the dustjacket himself using a computer and scanner — was originally not meant for publication, he said.

His love of the past, and need to express his feelings over significant events in his life (the deaths of his young sister, his father, and, later, his wife of 50 years) led to his literary effort.

"I began it as a family history, and intended to publish it only for my children. But the more I wrote, the more I realized I had a talent...prose just flowed into poetry on the pages."

A particularly touching story tells of how Guest, then a boy at Picton's old Mary Street School, met his future wife:

"My sister Ruth died in 1927, and because of the funeral, I was two days late for the start of the school year. When I arrived...I found the teacher waiting for me in the hallway, and with her was a very pretty girl about the same age as myself. She was also late because of a funeral; in her case, that of her father.

'Life has been very unkind to you youngsters,' said Miss Hubbs, placing Mary's hand in mine. She told us she was very sorry about our loss, and admonished us to look out for each other in any way we could. 'If you share each other's sadness, I'm sure everything will be all right.' And with that, she led us into the classroom and set us down together at the same double desk. Although there were a few giggles from the other kids, both Mary and I liked the arrangement well enough to share our books and lessons until the end of the term. And as our teacher predicted, everything turned out well."

In describing Strong Like the Mountain, Guest writes the following: "Imagine a world where pollution, violence and sexual abuse are of little concern, where drugs and the ozone layer are unknown and where AIDS and the hydrogen bomb do not exist."

Guest's creative effort was quite a change from his 30-year career as an automotive engineer for General Motors in Oshawa, where he developed GM's first automated assembly process.

But his vivid memories of boyhood and the way it was growing up in the county remained with him all his life.

"I guess there must have been a book stewing around in my mind for a long time," he said with a smile.

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