

# Area author wins high prize for children's stories

by JOHN CAMPBELL  
*The Independent*

How does a part-time librarian in Prince Edward County become the author of five children's books, including one that was nominated for an Ontario Silver Birch Award and a Manitoba Young Readers Choice Award in 2000?

It goes back to when Peggy Dymond Leavey won an essay contest open to all Grade Four students in Quebec. Writing had always been her favourite subject but winning that competition coupled with the encouragement that she received from teachers and family made her think: "Hey, maybe I can be a writer."

Her earliest pieces appeared regularly in the 1950s on the back page of Canadian Girl, a Sunday School paper published by the United Church. But years were to pass before she was able to realize her dream of being a professional writer.

In 1976, after countless rejections from magazines, Leavey decided to take a correspondence course in creative writing. It took her more than two years to complete, but it paid off. She subsequently sold her first assignment to an outdoors magazine and began producing articles for the newspaper in Trenton, where she and her husband reside. That led to her getting involved in the writing of histories of Trenton, Carrying Place and Ameliasburg.

tion she is asked most often is where she gets her ideas.

"I wish I could tell you there was a bank somewhere (where) you can ... draw an idea and work on it that day, but there isn't," she told her audience, made up mostly of children. "But ideas are all around us."

When not working on a book Leavey doesn't wait for an idea to come along: She sits down every morning and produces three pages of "free writing."

"I just write whatever comes into my head," she said.

Once she did this for a whole year between books. She kept at it because she knew one day "the magic was going to happen" - she would see a character develop, someone she could write about, or she would perceive "connections between ideas" that would form the basis for a story.

Leavey advised the children that if they wish to become an author they should look for opportunities to write. "Even if it's writing a letter to your grandma, make it the very best letter that you can ... because you learn to write by writing."

The experience propelled Leavey into writing her first book for publication, *The Movie Years*, a non-fiction work about the film industry that existed in Trenton between 1917 and 1934.

Leavey was also writing stories for children's magazines, one of which evolved into her first book for children eight to 12 years old. Published in 1994, *Help Wanted: Wednesday Only* was about a boy whose hero, his grandfather, develops Alzheimer's disease. It also deals with the problem of bullying.

Four more books followed, including *Sky Lake Summer* (which was nominated for multiple awards) and her most recent, *The Deep End Gang*, a mystery published earlier this year. She's just finished her sixth novel, a fantasy.

Leavey, who recently spoke at the Campbellford-Seymour Public Library, said the ques-

tion she is asked most often is where she gets her ideas. Leavey writes in longhand at her kitchen table. "I write quickly and I don't worry about the spelling or sentences," she said. "I just let it all go." She finishes an entire novel before entering it into her computer. The pages are printed and more changes made, sometimes taking as many as four drafts before a final version is ready to be sent to the publisher, who might then insist on further revisions being done.

So when a teacher says you need to re-write an assignment, she told the children, "Don't be discouraged, because we all have to do it."

Leavey invited the children to visit her website (<http://www.peggydymondleavey.com/>) and send e-mails about their reaction to her books.



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COBOURNE CHRONICLE  
JULY 24/03

600 DEATH NOTICES

KEARNS, EDNA LOVINA (WELLS)

Our mother and grandmother, Edna, died peacefully at the Golden Plough Lodge in Cobourg on Friday, July 18th, 2003. She was the beloved wife of the late Edward Kearns of Coborne. She was the loved mother of Edward and his wife Helen of Burlington, John and his wife Donna of Toronto, Joan and her husband Al of Oshawa, Mary of Cobourg, and Charlie (deceased) and his wife Sharon of Coborne. Grandmother to Ian Kearns of Toronto, Darrell Kearns of Toronto, Carla Smith (Glen) of Honolulu, Steve Kearns of Toronto, Sarah Galt (Dan) of Toronto, Robert Grills of Ashville, N.C., Richard Grills of Oshawa, Carol McPhilemy of Cobourg, Keith McPhilemy of Alberta, Kevin McPhilemy of Coborne, Kelly Bragg (Larry) of Cobourg, Chris Kearns of Coborne, Tom Kearns of Coborne, Jim Kearns (Jennifer) of Ameliasburg. Great grandmother to Naome, Donna, Mackenzie, Clarey, Kayla, Luke and Leah. Edna was born north of Napanee, Ontario and spent her formative years in the village of Marlbank. She married Ed in 1937 and they lived at Sandhurst and Oakville before moving to a farm near Castleton in 1947. After moving to Centreton and Lakeport they settled in Coborne in 1953 where she remained until she went to Cobourg in 1997. A service of remembrance will be held at MacCoubrey Funeral Home, 11 King Street West, Coborne, on Saturday, July 26. Interment at Salem Cemetery. Friends may call at the funeral home on Saturday from 1 to 2:30pm. and the service will be held at 2:30pm. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made by cheque to the Salvation Army or The Gideons. Condolences received at [www.maccoubrey.com](http://www.maccoubrey.com)