

# Eden Mills hosts 11th Writers' Festival

BY DALE HAMILTON  
THE COMPASS

Take one small village, add a generous helping of dedicated volunteers, combine with some of Canada's top writers and throw in an audience numbering in the thousands and the result is the Eden Mills Writers' Festival. This 11th annual celebration of the written word is set for Sunday, September 12th from 12 noon until 6 p.m., rain or shine.

In order to respond to burgeoning audiences, several new reading sites have been added this year. There are also other changes in the wind. For instance, Eden Mills poet Joshua Willoughby has organized a new component called "The New Writers' Forum," which will present a wide range of up-and-coming authors such as Simon Frank, Suzanne Hancock, Erina Harris and Scott Wicken. Josh is no stranger to this kind of series, having organized the spoken word com-

ponent of the Hillside Festival for several years, as well as two local reading series called *Voices* and *Spring Miscellany*, all of which have been well-received by both readers and listeners. The Guelph Native Men's Drum Group will also appear, a first for the festival.

An all-too-often overlooked gem within the festival is the Children's Authors' Readings, organized by Eden Mills children's book illustrator and author Janet Wilson. This year's lineup of children's authors include Michael (Arvaarluk) Kusugak, Janet Lunn, Kathy Stinson, Phoebe Gilman, Shari Siamon, Paul Morin, Maxine Trotter, Rukhsana Khan, and Sonja Dunn. Janet Wilson will be launching her 15th book, *Me and Mr. Mah*.

I think I've attended the festival every year since it began. My early memories of the Eden Mills

Writers' Festival are perhaps the fondest. That was before very many people had discovered the festival; when you could stand just a few arm-lengths away from the readers and even chat with them afterwards. You could see Leon Rooke, dressed in burgundy velvet pants and flowing white shirt, eccentric hair blowing out behind him, waltzing down the main street of Eden Mills with an armful of books gathered to his chest.

It all began back in the late 1980's, when Governor-General Award winning author (and then Eden Mills-ite) Leon Rooke happened to mention to the owners of the old Eden Mills General Store that he had a new book coming out. They suggested that the store host a little launch celebration and Leon enthusiastically agreed, suggesting that he invite a couple of writer-friends who also had new books

coming out. This is when the seeds for the present-day festival were sown because the "writer-friends" Leon had in mind included well-known authors Michael Ondaatje and Timothy Findlay.

Now that the founders of the festival, Leon and Connie Rooke, have moved to Winnipeg, it inevitably raises questions about the future of the festival. A recent planning meeting indicated that there is enough old and new "blood" to sustain the festival into the foreseeable future and that volunteers from within the village and from outside the village will combine their efforts to keep this one of the best literary festivals in Canada.

The 1999 roster of authors include: Roch Carrier, Patrick Friesen, Laurie Gough, Janice Kulyk-Keefer, Thomas King, Dennis Lee, Leon Rooke and Shyam Selvadurai. For a complete listing of featured authors, visit the festival web site: [www.sentex/~pql](http://www.sentex/~pql) or call 519-826-0876. Advance tickets are available at Eden Place in Eden Mills, plus The Bookshelf Café and Macondo Books in Guelph. General admission is \$8, and students and children are \$5.

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To the 4-H members... you have a chance to win cash for selling calendars!

## What Really Matters

in  
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with  
Councillor Alan McDonald



I now understand the relationship between the Sea and those that ride upon her waves. I knew the power of water, but now I know the rage of the Sea. The water is the body of the sea, the wind her legs, the shore her claws and teeth, the cold the muscles that give strength to her grip, and the tide part of her magic.

I send to you my thoughts from across the Atlantic Ocean. Here I am at my in-laws home, on Ballymaginty Road, just outside of Lietrim in Northern Ireland. A 10 minute drive takes us to the harbour in Newcastle. My father-in-law belongs to the Newcastle Yacht Club. The club members all have one common interest: they love the Sea and want to conquer her awesome strength. Most club members use the same weapon with which to tame the wild sea. The weapon of choice for these hunters is a Mirror dingy sail boat. A Mirror is less than 12 feet long. I need not give more description. Each Sunday the members of the club race in their Mirrors around three buoys, each carefully placed off the harbour. On the surface they all seem to be in a race with one another, but that is only a curtain to hide the truth. Each person on those boats attempts a duel with the waves the wind and the cold. The sea laughs at their courage and allows them to play. How kind of the sea, don't you think? I do.

I caught a small crab for my son. He tossed the crab back and forth from one hand to the other as it attempted escape.

My father-in-law, Barry, being much braver than I, took me for a ride in his Mirror, the Ednalilly. Across Dundrum Bay was our course. A small gale blew up. Our rudder broke. Perhaps a mile off shore, I was afraid for my life. We struggled to reach the shore. When I finally leapt from the Ednalilly, the sand three feet down, the shore now 100 meters away, I turned and looked out at the sea. The sea said to me, "Now you know how my little crab felt?" I turned to the Captain of the Ednalilly and he said, "Wasn't that great? Good job at steering with that paddle Al."

I have always had admiration and respect for my father-in-law. Now I am afraid as well. The next day my curiosity had its way with me. I asked Barry to help me understand the conflict in Northern Ireland. A few hours later we were sitting in the conservatory together. He was reading a newspaper. He stood up, walked past me, dropping the newspaper upon my lap, remarking, "A well educated person wrote this letter. Perhaps reading it will answer your questions about the troubles here better than I can."

The letter was written in retaliation to a previously printed letter. The two authors referred to an event of extreme conflict.

The subject of the letter was to "set the record straight" and "make known facts that were left out." Reference was to an event that involved instigating and promoting tensions, violence, shooting, and murder. The author continued to refer to actions of persons involved that were not reported by the letter one week earlier. He then criticized the writer for failing to report all of the facts.

The incident to which each of the printed letters referred happened not last month, not last year, but in 1849.

Today, feelings of resentment, revenge, hate, prejudice, still affect the quality of life in the North of Ireland. Those feelings are fuelled by what had happened. Memories of 1849!

To try and argue a point with either of the two persons that had written the letters to which I have referred would be futile. Reading that letter helped me to realize what is really important. Today is important. Tomorrow is important. Yesterday is not important.

I do not suggest that we ignore the past, or forget the past. I do suggest that we learn from the past; and distinguish between what is negative and what is positive.

Your comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please contact Alan McDonald at 519-856-1167 or at 125 Princess Street, P.O. Box 268, Rockwood, ON, N0B 2K0.

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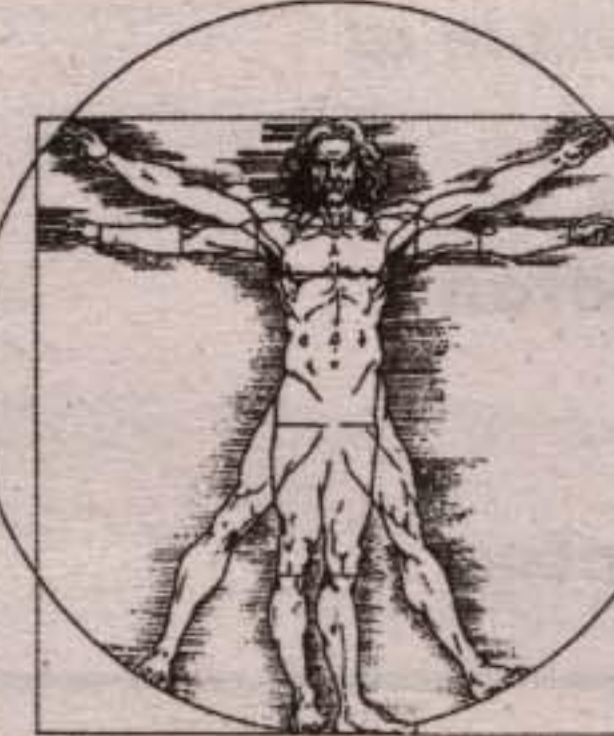
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