



Our Canadian Girl series now in print

Quaile Reviews by Deborah Quaile

Penguin Canada has released four novels aimed at girls eight to 12 years of age, and it is hoped to be a favourite with readers across the country. Our Canadian Girl relates Canada's past from the perspective of fictional girls who lived it. Historical narratives are ripe with drama and adventure, and enmesh a great deal of everyday back-ground.

Three of our local folk are involved with the first set in the series. Eden Mills illustrator Janet Wilson has done the cover design and interior artwork for *Across the James Bay Bridge*, a story written by Julie Lawson. As in all the books, the interior illustrations are black and white pencil renderings, with small chapter headers as well. The front cover is richer, with the heroine dressed in burgundy and set against the narrow brick walls of Victoria's Chinatown. The book is written by Julie Lawson and details Emily's middle-class lifestyle with her parents and two younger sisters. One of her best friends is Hing, the family's Chinese servant, and through that relationship she discovers the disparity between herself and others who are repressed by the whites.

Everton author Kathy Stinson has written *Dark Spring*, the story of Marie-Claire in Montreal. It's the smallpox epidemic of 1885. Through Marie-Claire's life in a poor home with a working class family, readers are offered glimpses of the difficulties everyday life brings - her father's accident, the death of her brother, ravages of overwork, illness and the filth of the city. Her struggle to persevere and maintain a sense of optimism is inspiring. Stinson has created an intriguing character and readers cannot help but wish for the devastating burdens that press on her family to be lifted.

Author Sharon McKay, who

wrote *Charlie Wilcox* in 1999 and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award, has crafted *Terror in the Harbour*. In 1917, Penny and her sisters live with their father, a building contractor, in Halifax. On the morning of December 6, Penny's father

goes off to work at the harbour, leaving her to ready her sisters for their day at the babysitter's. On the way, the tragic explosion rocks Halifax and destroys almost everything Penny knows. For the next day, she must live by her wits to save her sisters from fire, cold, hunger and the devastating loss of their home. McKay has created the most engrossing tale but pulls no punches when it comes to realism. It's a moving story, one that could trigger discussion between readers and would be an excellent choice for study at school.

Also in the series is *A Mighty Big Imagining*, the story of ten-year-old Rachel who arrives in Nova Scotia in 1783 to escape slavery in South Carolina. The family's joy at freedom is trampled when they discover the harsh winter landscape to which they have fled; the land is barren, the weather unexpected, and the family doesn't have enough to eat. It's a serious challenge to overcome the difficulties in the new land.

For further information on the Our Canadian Girl series, you can visit the website: www.ourcanadiangirl.com.

Dark Spring

Written by Kathy Stinson

Terror in the Harbour

Written by Sharon McKay

Across the James Bay Bridge

Written by Julie Lawson, illustrated by Janet Wilson

A Mighty Big Imagining

Written by Lynne Kositsky

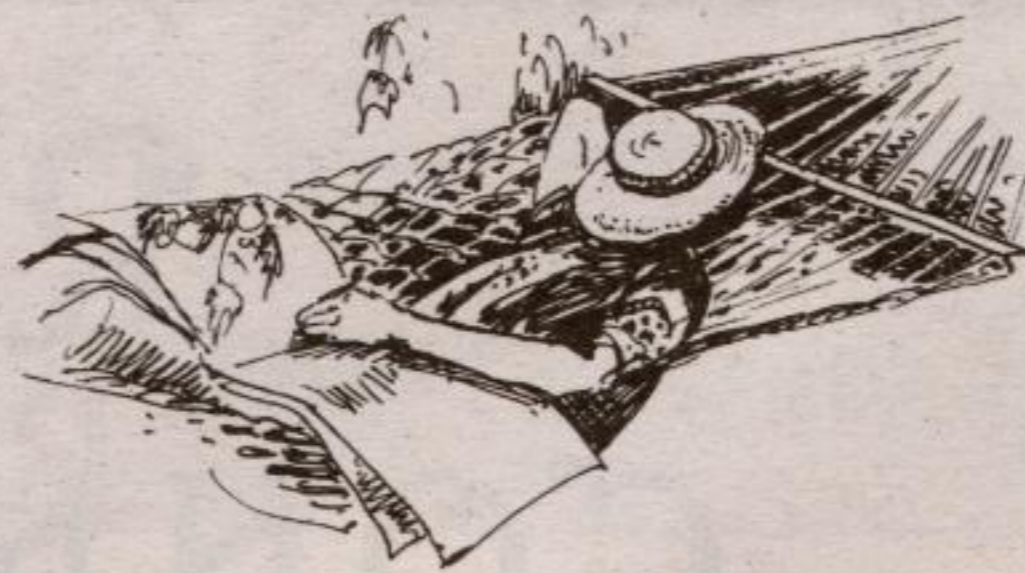
Toronto: Penguin Books

Canada Ltd., 2001.

\$7.99, Softcover



Idle



Pursuits

Seeing Fall Fairs through the eyes of an artist

by Deborah Quaile

Since the history of the fall fair raises awareness of our agricultural base and celebrates the rich rural and urban diversity we have in our area, three local artists have taken it upon themselves to celebrate the traditions. Gail Root, Rosalyn Insley and Susan Strachan Johnson recently finished a series of works that will inspire and spark fond memories in all of us.

The show grew out of the successful *Barns of Wellington County* show (Elora 1998) and *Twelve Churches of Old Eramosa* (Guelph 1999). All three artists love going to fall fairs and are impressed with the fact that there's something for everyone.

Susan Strachan Johnson says fall fairs are a rich source of artistic materials - whether painting people, animals, flowers, or still life, there's a painting everywhere she looks. Although all three artists are representational painters, their styles and media treat the subjects very differently. Ms. Insley paints in acrylic; Ms. Root in watercolour and pastels and Ms. Johnson works in watercolour and collage. The interest for the viewer is not only in the subject matter, but also in the



Submitted Photo

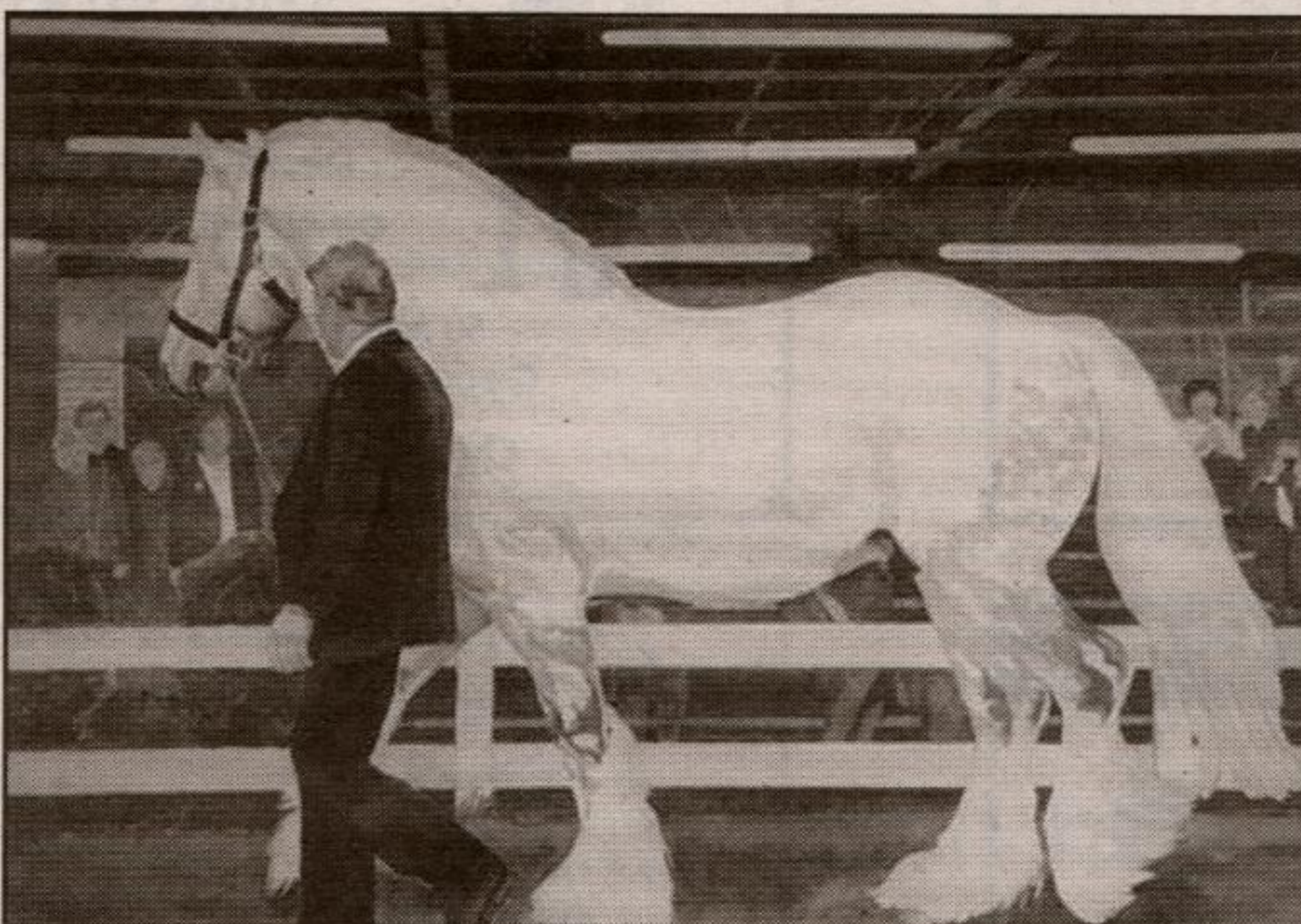
The three artists. Left to right: Gail Root, Susan Strachan Johnson and Rosalyn Insley at the opening reception at the Halton Hills Cultural Centre, Georgetown.

difference in their artistic interpretations.

Perhaps it's the goats peering through the slats of their pen, or children enamoured with pumpkins larger than they are. A judge, pondering the merits of poultry, or a clutch of ladies admiring needlework displays. The 57 original works portray the burnished golds and auburns of the impending autumn, covering a range of sub-

jects from ponies to pickups to pumpkins. There are casual, relaxed poses from all angles, not just of the contestants in the fair but the visitors. Old and young folk are captured waiting for judging, completing barn chores, showing animals, devouring candy floss or admiring potatoes. The depictions offer up a range of emotions and the attention to everyday detail - fun, anxiety, warmth, and even exhaustion - makes the work come alive and feel richly personal.

The Fall Fairs Art Show was at the Halton Hills Cultural Centre throughout September, but the artists have now been invited to take the show to the Wellington County Museum, County Rd. 18, Fergus from Saturday, October 6, 2001 to Sunday, February 17, 2002. The Museum is open weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and weekends 1 to 5 p.m. Call 519-846-0916 for further information. You may also call the artists directly for information on their work: Rosalyn Insley 519-856-1357; Gail Root 519-856-4143; Susan Strachan Johnson 519-856-2364.



Submitted Photo

Grey Stallion at the Royal, one of the watercolour collages by Susan Strachan Johnson at the Fall Fairs Art Show.

Writer's Festival a day to remember

by Naomi Powell

The sign on the road read: "13th Annual Eden Mills Writers' Fest: Come for the Words." And they came.

Crowds of local families, literary urbanites and canvas clad college kids squeezed through the tiny streets of Eden Mills on September 9 for readings by acclaimed writers like Patrick Lane, P.K. Page, Guy Vanderhaeghe, David Adams Richards, Leon Rooke, Peter Robinson, Diane Schoemperlen and Peter Carey among others.

"I put it on my calendar every year," said Marge Kelly, a festival

devotee who drove from Toronto for the event. For Ms. Kelly and her friend Diana Stephenson, the most moving reading of the day came from Ken Wiwa, author of *The Shadow of a Saint*. The book tells the story of growing up in the shadow of his father, Ogoni activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. Mr. Wiwa began an exciting set of readings that included William J. Thomas and David Adams Richards.

Founded by Governor General Award winning author and former Eden Mills resident Leon

Rooke, the Eden Mills Writers' festival is run entirely by local volunteers, many of whom donate their backyards and gardens as reading venues. The result is an intimate, community atmosphere that sets the Eden Mills festival apart from stodgier literary events.

Children's authors for example, read in a backyard where kids and parents sat cross-legged on the grass to hear readings from authors like Margaret Carney, Deb Loughead, Kenneth Opper and

(Continued on next page)



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