

Poet gets down to earth with her first book

Escarpment offers inspiration

By **Stephanie Thiessen**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

The mysteries of nature and the complexities of mankind are subjects a local author grapples with in her first book of poetry, *A Meditation on Nature* — the Poetry of Alide Kohlhaas.

At first glance the topics may appear worlds apart, but Kohlhaas says she can't keep them separate.

"To me human nature and the natural elements and seasons are inextricably interwoven," she writes in her preface.

The 68-year-old journalist has had ample opportunity to observe both during her extensive traveling.

"Nature sharpens your mind toward it (human nature)," she explained.

A Meditation on Nature is a collection of mostly lyric poems and haiku. It was published in December by CamKohl Arts Productions, a company Kohlhaas co-founded.

Some of the poems are light in nature, while others focus on the darker side of life. There are several poems about the atrocities of war, some of which arose from her time spent teaching English and history in northern China.

"China is an illusion," she said, adding there's no such thing as human rights in the country. "Canadians don't understand how lucky they are."

One poem, *Korea Bound*, talks of Kohlhaas' encounter when she was a teenager with a young soldier off to fight in Korea. "You laughed, so full of life you were/ on this journey west/ Yet soon, too soon, you would be dead," reads one of



Alide Kohlhaas shows one of her new poetry books as she enjoys a Mill Pond trail.

the haunting stanzas.

The long-time Milton area resident lives in the shadow of the Niagara Escarpment and enjoys writing about what she sees outside her window, as well as taking photographs, some of which appear in her book.

Her poems about nature largely focus on fall and winter, her favourite seasons.

"I'm not much for summer. I call myself a northern child," she said.

Seldom does Kohlhaas sit down to write a poem, she said. Instead, the poems come to her. Sometimes she'll wake up

with a line, other times the words present themselves as she's going for a walk.

To say Kohlhaas has led an adventurous life is an understatement.

She was born in Germany and, demonstrating her independent nature early on, left the country on her own when she was just 14. She moved to Vancouver and then furthered her education in England before moving to Ontario.

"I've lived in two dictatorships — one on the right, one on the left, but they're both the same," she said, referring to her birthplace and her time teaching in China.

As a journalist, she's tackled just about every kind of writing imaginable, from medical to community news coverage, and currently writes for a publication called the *Seniors Review*, which is distributed in the Niagara region.

"I just have to express myself through writing," she said.

Kohlhaas is also editing a history book, and has two fiction works in mind.

Knowledge is something she can't seem to get enough of, she said. "But then I always feel I have to share it," she said. "(Or else) what's the use of having it?"

Art is another hobby of Kohlhaas', and the haiku poems in her book are illustrated with Japanese wood cuts.

"When I want to relax, I start doing art," she said.

Kohlhaas said she's living proof that you're only as old as you think you are.

"I don't feel old. I do more (now) than I did 30 years ago. I don't know what it is to be old," she said, adding, "Age is a state of mind."

A Meditation on Nature costs \$18.95 and is available at A Different Drummer Books in Burlington.

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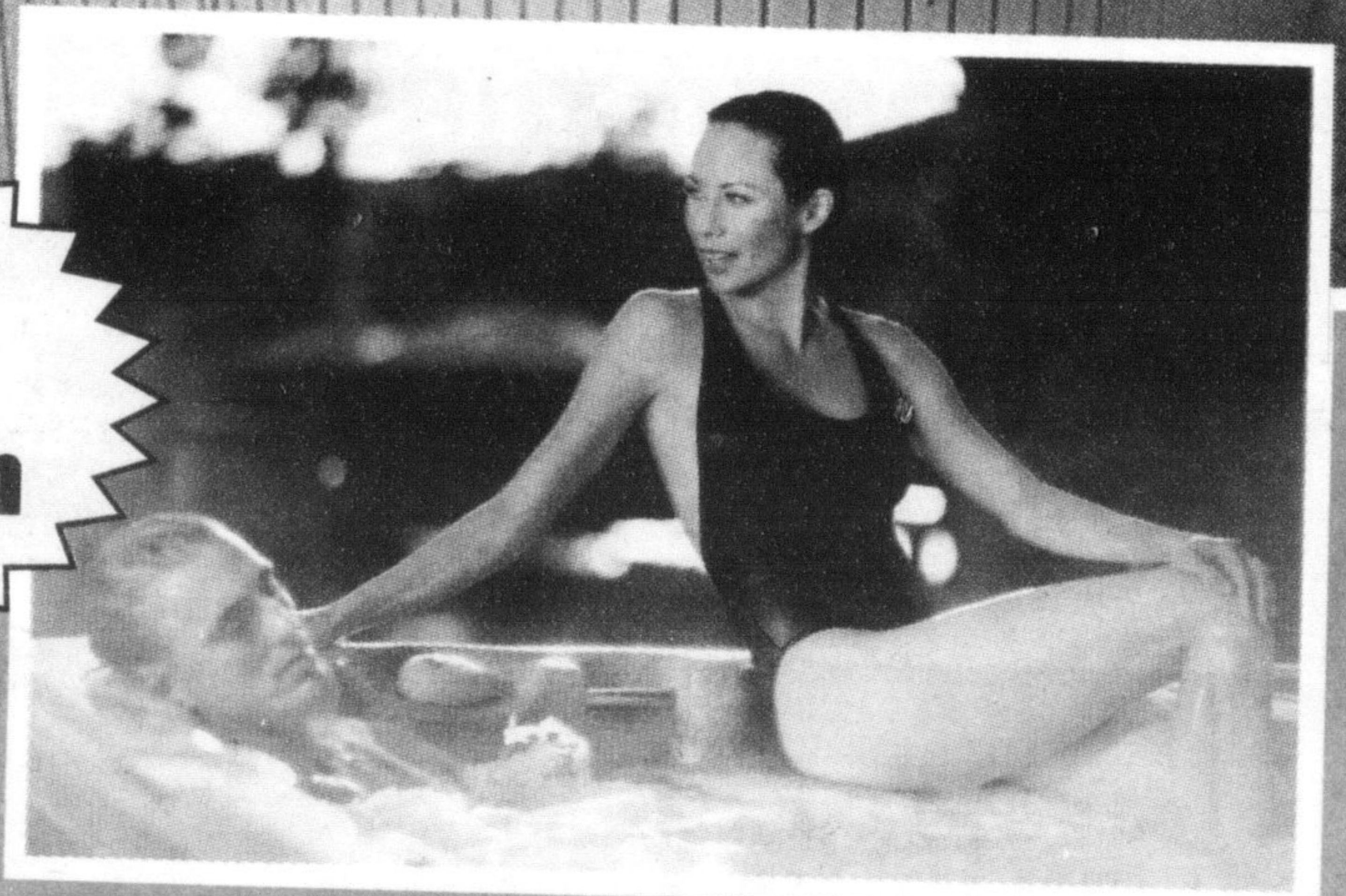
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