

friend in high school, Joan. Her grandmother, Mrs. Morrison, was a bit senile, and a sweetheart. I used her name out of respect, and turned senility into eccentricity. The character's theatre background came from a woman I met during my acting days. Director Maria Hughes, a Brit living in Thompson, MB, practically grew up back-stage in London, sewing buttons on costumes, as both her parents were actors. Mrs. Morrison's habit of walking around inside and out wearing fuzzy pink slippers, singing show tunes, is my own (grinning).

Gail: Many writers infuse their writing with autobiographical details, and clearly you're one of them. What sorts of experiences have you drawn upon in your portrait of Kaylee and in your other works?

Anita: I use plenty of real bits in my stories, real life happenings, and twisted and transplanted names. I've never stopped to think too long on autobiographical details, though I suppose they are there. When I was living in Sault Ste. Marie a few years back, my doctor, Dr. Marrack, said to me after reading *Flight from Big Tangle*, "Kaylee needs a friend! Why does she spend so much time alone?" That gave me pause. It never occurred to me that Kaylee might be lonely. As a child I spent quite a lot of time on my own, lost in dreams, exploring physical and imaginary landscapes. I loved being on my own! I suppose that as Kaylee developed into her own character, she borrowed some of my characteristics. Fears too. Though I do not let it stop me from doing something I feel is worthwhile, I definitely have a fear of flying. Kaylee may have worked though much of her fear in the first book. I have not.

Gail: Whom do you read and admire? Which writers might influence your own writing?

Anita: I adore Tim Wynne Jones,

his creativity, skill, and fearlessness, as well as his sense of play. I love Richard's Scrimger's wit, Beth Goobie's ever-expanding imagination, Ken Oppell's knack for adventure, the profligacy of Eric Walters, and Guy Vanderhaeghe's ability to turn language into a rich and textured tapestry. There are so many writers I admire. I learn from them all.

Gail: Why does writing about northern places and about northern experiences matter to you?

Anita: There are a few reasons, I suppose. Some of my most significant memories of childhood are rooted in northern communities, and much of my heart is still there. Also, I believe it is important for young people to have access to stories that are relevant to them. It is my hope that if they have stories set in their backyards, or otherwise near in similar experience, they will be encouraged to read them. It is also my hope that children in more southern locations might be interested in learning more about less traveled parts of this country that we live in and love so much.

Gail: To your mind, what is the best thing about being a writer, so far?

Anita: Funny thing about a story. When you tell one, it often sparks another from someone else. What I love most about being a writer (other than getting lost in words when the writing is going well), is visiting classrooms, speaking with young people, sharing my stories, my experiences, and theirs.

Gail: In this age of the instant messages, e-mail, chatrooms, and blogs, some argue that the printed word—other than on the Internet—is obsolete and no longer matters. Why does the printed word matter to you? Why does writing matter to you?

Anita: Why do they both matter to me? I can still remember as a young girl embarking on the adventure that reading is. Beyond *Mr.*

