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JULY 9, 2014 | 082-14

New Laurier Arts students meet online through *My Life Among the Apes*

WATERLOO – Laurier’s Faculty of Arts kicked off its second annual Common Reading Program with the short story collection, *My Life Among the Apes*, by Toronto author Cary Fagan. But rather than reading the same book in isolation, each of Laurier’s nearly 1,000 incoming first-year Faculty of Arts students, who received a free copy of the book in early July, are encouraged to join the program’s Facebook group to discuss the book and use it as a conversation starter to meet one another before they arrive at Laurier in September.

With stories ranging from “The Floating Wife” and “Shit Box” to “The Brooklyn Revenge,” the collection, which was long-listed for The Scotiabank Giller Prize, is sure to appeal to students’ desire for an enjoyable summer reading experience. Each story promises to transport students to a different world where people experience life, confront decisions and make choices.

“For me, this collection of stories is about dreams,” said Michael Carroll, dean of Laurier’s Faculty of Arts. “What happens when you pursue your dreams, what happens when you don’t, and the gains and losses that can come with either scenario. I look forward to hearing how these stories connect with our new students.”

In addition to the book’s broad appeal, the themes in *My Life Among the Apes* also support the underlying academic purpose of the program.

“The predominant themes in the book are wide ranging, which lends itself to the possibility of incorporating discussions into many program curricula in the Faculty of Arts,” said Mercedes Rowinsky-Geurts, associate dean: student affairs and special projects, Faculty of Arts. “The stories speak to themes of memory, relationships, identity, careers versus passion as well as the environment, contamination, religion and gender.”

When the first-year Arts students arrive on Laurier’s Waterloo campus in September, they will have the opportunity to meet Fagan during in-class visits and a presentation about the process of creating short stories on September 17 and a writing workshop with the author on September 18.

Fagan has written many novels as well as children’s books. *Valentine’s Fall* was a finalist for the City of Toronto Book Award, and his short fiction was included in *Best Canadian Stories*. He has received two Jewish Book Awards and a Mr. Christie Silver Medal.

My Life Among the Apes is published by Cormorant Books, an independent, Canadian-owned literary publishing house. *My Life Among the Apes* will be available in e-reader versions from July 1 to Sept. 30 for \$1.99. The book is also available for purchase at the Bookstore on Laurier’s Waterloo Campus and the Stedman Community Bookstore in Brantford.

The Common Reading Program began in 2013 with *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese, and is supported by the dean of the Faculty of Arts, Student Life Levy, Council for the Intellectual and Cultural Development of the Arts (CICDA), Cormorant Books and Laurier Bookstore. www.facebook.com/groups/LaurierArtsCommonReading