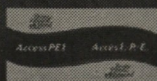


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A message from the Prince Edward Island Smoke Free Homes Committee.



News Flash: Normal People Read, Write Books

By Joel GILLESPIE

Remember way back in early September when you had to trek over to the Bookstore and buy piles of rectangular-shaped objects known as 'books,' and swore to yourself that this year, you'd actually read them?

Well, as my intensive, week-end-long investigation has turned up, actual real people are responsible for creating (or 'writing,' as those in the circle call it) some of these very same books.

Equal parts trade show, gossip-fest, and social gathering for members involved in this secretive cult, The Word on the Street is a yearly celebration of reading and writing in Canada. Its alleged purpose, according to organizers, is to celebrate Canadian literacy and the printed word.

But the ulterior purpose?

A good question. I learned to hold my tongue and allow the shadowy members of the Cult of Writers emerge at their own pace. During this event, they freely emerge from their dusky abodes, proclaiming to be normal members of society.

Contrary to what you may believe, there were no firm divisions between the so-called 'New Writers' and 'Established Writers.' All were welcome to socialize, banter, and share horror stories about their craft. There were cliques, to be certain, but nothing that gave away the underlying organization of writers in Atlantic Canada.

The official event occurred on Sunday, September 29th, yet that was but half the story. A good deal of networking happened the night before, where a rowdy group of writers congregated to partake in varying amounts of alcohol and join in a spirit of camaraderie. Having partaken more than my fair share of alcohol that night, I am unable to recount the event reliably. However, I do remember speaking with a strapping lad named Larry Lynch, whose new book (*An Expectation of Home*), was drawing early hype, and narrowly escaping a bar-room brawl with an major, intoxicated Newfoundland writer of chil-

dren's books who shall remain nameless.

The event itself was a wonder to behold. Taking place in downtown Halifax, the writers -- and a large number of their fans -- spent equal amounts of time experiencing public readings and sampling the works of other authors. There was an impressive line up of over ninety -- yes, ninety -- authors, poets, dramatists, wordsmiths, punsters, and the occasional rock star.

It truly was a carnival atmosphere, complete with stilt-walking clowns, over-priced food of a questionable nutritional value, and the need to yell to be heard over the dull roar of the assembled crowd.

The noise itself was a double-edged sword. It worked well for the open-air poetry venue, with an animated George Eliot Clarke shouting from his "Execution Poems" as gospel to a large crowd, but worked against those who were in smaller tents or who had no microphones, such as the celebrity readers' and Newfoundland/Labrador authors' tents. As a general rule, the louder a reader was, the more people they attracted

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Between readings, merchants selling piles of books by local authors were swamped by ravenous consumers eager to snatch up the latest and greatest releases. On the other end of the spectrum, remainder tables were busy liquidating those books who have yet to find a mass-market acceptance. (Two dollars for Evan Solomon's "Crossing the Distance" makes me smile on so many levels.)

If I learned nothing else during this event, it is that writers actually do live, work, eat, and sleep among us. And not all of them wear black berets and chain-smoke in trendy Greek cafés.