

Scratchings



Newsletter of the Haliburton Highlands Writers' and Editors' Network

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Welcome

to the first issue of *Scratchings*, the newsletter of the Haliburton Highlands Writers' and Editors' Network (HHWEN). A big thank you to all who submitted names for our contest. We received 26 entries. The winning name was submitted by Peter Goodchild. As Peter said, the name reflects our rustic/rural environment, and also indicates the use of early writing devices. Webster even lists one definition of *scratch* as "to write or draw on a surface." Congratulations, Peter!

HHWEN Announces New Logo

HHWEN is proud to introduce its new logo. The logo was designed and created by Ian Tomas, graphic designer and owner of Sky Earth Canada (<http://www.skyearth.org>).

The logo, a mingling of pen and book, sun, water and forest, uniquely and beautifully identifies HHWEN as an organization for writers and editors living in the beautiful natural setting of the Haliburton Highlands.

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Pine Box

by Robyn King Thomas

Dad is dying. Get on down here.

I knew someday the call would come, those strident, sister words scudding as clouds of swollen tears. We live we die.

An unexpected voice crackled far distant on the phone. My Father; a haven for warm hugs, child arms slipped about his leather neck, and sturdy knees to slide upon when a story would unfold. This was Dad - the man with a big heart and now a man whose knees were buckling, no longer strong. Not from lack of courage, nor fear of death, sarcomas exploding from his neck, a soldier brave in shifting sands, *where flies were so thick, you ate them with your rations dear.*

Grief gnawed dismal, no coins for a burial and no pine box. *Not enough pennies in the kitty, dear.* Dad of the nice wife and nice life, almost dust and needing a hand for a burial, demise with dignity. Lines buzzed, distance between us a chasm bleak.

Hang on. I'll be there.

Dad on the phone exhaled relief expelling forbidden vestiges of a savoured cigarette, ashes flicked at life.

I jumped on a plane and encircled the world. As the last page of his life story turned, we bade a soulful goodbye and Dad walked a path I was unable to

follow. Tears splashed hot.

Stacks of urns don't take up much space. *Room enough for us all. You too dear,* Dad said. Sea-green eyes concealed a molten smile. A burning pyre inflamed my heart, and Dad in a beautiful box.

Dad, you're the best in the world... Essence of man, his spirit released, strewn as flowers by loving hands. Sunshine flowers, petals unfurled to greet the day, bade my father a gracious farewell.

Box to Urn, ashes to Earth, and Dad moved to a distant place. No voice crackling over the phone and this heart, forlorn. A savoured cigarette, ashes flicked, and child arms slipped about his leather neck - stories unfolding - not forgotten, *dear.*

Robyn Thomas is from New Zealand and currently writes from her home on Lake Kashagawigamog. She won third place for "Pine Box" in an "Australasian Emerging Writers" short story contest - postcard category. "Australasian" encompasses citizens of New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific Islands. Robyn works with Jack Brezina on ARTSWEEK, a regular radio program on Canoe FM. Her work has been published in various magazines and she is currently working on a series of children's stories for Random House.

From the Prez...



A Meeting of Minds and Hearts

A History of the Haliburton Highlands Writers' and Editors' Network

by Pauline Johnson, President



Writers are at home in their own minds. To be motivated, they need a muse and the tools to record their ideas and feelings. Because writing is such a solitary activity however, it helps to also have the support of peers and this is where the importance of writers' circles and networks comes in. There are others around the province, and when a new one is started, the numbers swell rapidly.

Such was the case in Haliburton. This organization was conceived in June of 2003 at the end of a writing class given by Marjorie Ludlow Green from Minden. The Minden Writers' Circle was the result of the connection that the writers had formed in the class. Part of the group wanted merely to belong to a small writers' circle. Others decided to form, in addition, an umbrella organization – HHWEN which would distribute news releases, invite speakers, organize events and set up workshops to draw writers together from across the county as well as linking Haliburton writers with other such umbrella organizations around the province. While learning about authors' lives and what inspires them to write is of interest, much of the focus is on the business of writing including topics such as writers' markets, learning what editors want, finding an agent, tax strategies, self publishing, applying for grants from such

sources as the Ontario Arts Council and Canada Council, and so on.

The official mandate of the group is as follows: *The Haliburton Highlands Writers' and Editors' Network is an umbrella organization dedicated to encouraging and promoting the art and skill of writing, fostering literacy, and providing moral support to writers of all ages through education and networking, both independently and in cooperation with existing organizations.*

To date, the organization has hosted several breakfast meetings and lunches, welcoming such speakers as Steve Galea, local columnist and freelance writer; Jack Brezina, former editor and publisher of *The Times*; Kevin Humphries who spoke about website development; Lea Harper, acclaimed poet and Juno Award winning songwriter; and Reg Holloway, globetrotting journalist and member of the British foreign service. We look forward at future meetings to hearing from Jim Poling Sr., author of *Tom Thomson and His Mysterious Death* as well as Michael Barnes, a prolific local author.

Much progress has been made since the founding of the organization. Currently there are three writers' circles in the county: The Minden Writers' Circle, generously hosted by Kay Millard and Helen Allore; the Haliburton

Writers' Circle, hosted by aspiring novelist Candy Youngdale; and Teen Writers, hosted by Robyn Thomas and coordinated by Ainslie Thomas. Members are planning events such as the one in Dorset on April 23 featuring Wine, Words, Music and Art. Tiina Heathcock and Melissa Alfano have collaborated on this. In the future, we may see poetry groups, a Christian writers' circle, a senior circle for those writing memoirs, a circle for writers of children's stories and so on. Workshops on such things as applying for writers' grants, self publishing and writing query letters will be offered in the coming year.

With our terrific new logo, the first edition of our newsletter and the registering of our domain name for our soon to be developed website, we are rapidly on the move. Some people have worked very hard to make their vision of a Writers' and Editors' Network a reality in the Highlands. New members and volunteers are most welcome.

Writers observe, analyze and record life. It is only fitting that they have the opportunity to do it supported by their peers, those of like mind and heart.





Time

by Arlene Johnston



If I put to use all the time that I have spent
Sitting around wondering where it all went

I would be a scholar,
an astronaut,
a writer of tales

One who pushes forward even if I fail

Instead I sit and while away the hours

Wondering what to do
Rarely accomplishing anything
Well, maybe a thing or two

The time has come to complete a task

“Which one shall I do?” is the question I ask

I am so overwhelmed
There are too many to choose
There is always tomorrow
It is time for my snooze



As our publicist, Arlene Johnston is responsible for writing and submitting articles to local media promoting our events. Arlene is currently spending a lot of her time on a novel. She gets an amazing high from creating real life characters and putting them in motion.

Maureen Buxcey In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Maureen Buxcey, writer and wife of HHWEN member Don Buxcey.

Maureen wanted very much to be a part of HHWEN, but unfortunately, due to her illness, Maureen was unable to participate. The few of us who did get to know her, however briefly, will remember her and miss her. Maureen was a kind and loving person whose gentle qualities came out in her writing. She was a writer from her childhood years and, more recently, had been working on her 'memories'. Her husband, Don, is currently assembling her many stories for a book he is having published to give to her many friends and relatives in memory of Maureen.

It was Don and Maureen's wish that, in lieu of flowers, donations be given to Maureen's favourite cause - HHWEN. In Maureen's name, HHWEN has received donations totalling over \$300. Don has requested that the money be reserved for a special project to be determined in the future. HHWEN would like to extend sincere gratitude to Maureen's family and friends.





The Comma-Or Else!

by Don Buxcey

"Shut up! Just shut up."

"Yeah? Think I'm going to give in again? At college, they taught me proper grammatical construction. I know where to put the comma in a sentence. You read the 'Fowlers' grammar book, so why can't you put them where you should and leave them out when they are not needed?"

"Look, I was educated in Oxford and I know the King's English."

"No----! Is he?" quipped I.

"Well, he was. You're changing the subject. He was in a coma, just like you. You don't know the difference between a comma and a coma." She snorted as she laughed at her own joke.

"I put them into places where I would pause slightly, when I am talking, to slow down the pace of my speech." I responded with vigour to the challenge.

"You just can't think fast enough to keep up with your mouth. Maybe you should get an operation to attach your brain to your tongue."

I was starting to believe that this sarcastic exchange was getting out of hand. There must be some way of determining where to put the blasted commas. The grammar book takes fifteen pages to discuss the comma, and certain writers spend half a day trying to decide whether to put one in or leave it out.

"You can't write the way you talk," she began again. "You must convey to the reader what you want to say, and leave the words on the page to speak for themselves. You will not be there to explain or clarify anything."

"Oh, why can't we find symbols to show body language on paper - it would make this writing job a lot easier. Why, in five thousand years, haven't we discovered some squiggles to represent body movements while speaking, so that the attitude and mood of the speaker is identifiable?"

"Oh! Trust you to think of a way out of using commas correctly. Just

use the tools we have and write eloquently—so that the sense is conveyed to your reader, in the way in which you intend it."

"How's this? I hereby, proclaim this man shall go, free from the gallows, to serve, in the galleys for five years, or until the cows come home and are, restored to their owner.

"There—is that specific enough for you? It says exactly what I mean."

"Can't you see it's jerky, just like you? Nobody talks like that—it doesn't make sense."

"You just told me not to write the way I talk—so, I didn't. What's wrong with it? I'm getting very upset with this comma business. Maybe I will leave them out altogether and let Marge put them in where she thinks they should go."

"Then you'll get them right. But you won't have a headache—Marge will. And it won't be your work, will it?"

"Yes, it will. It will just be edited."

"Do you think an editor has nothing to do but play with your commas?"

"Why? Isn't that what editors get paid to do?"

"Why don't you ask Marjorie about that the next time you see her? You will be lucky if she doesn't knock your block off."

Well okay, said I to myself. Maybe I should read the fifteen pages and get somebody to translate them into English for me. Latin was easier: The comma, up with which they did not have to put. And Mark Twain said that German was bad.



Don Buxcey has been involved with HHWEN since the very beginning. He loves to be surrounded by fellow writers and, like his editor, Marjorie Ludlow Green, was involved with WCDR in Oshawa before moving to the Haliburton area. Don moved to Minden in October 2003, and now finds great support in both the Haliburton and Minden Writers' Circles. A spiritual, non-fiction writer with a flare for humour, Don belongs to "The Word Guild," an association that promotes Canadian writers who are Christian. His latest efforts, seeking a publisher, are "God's D.N.A." and "Thus Sings My Soul".

The Punctuation Plight

Like Don, all writers struggle with commas and other punctuation at some point. It's no wonder — punctuation can have a significant effect on our words. Take the following example:

Woman without her man is nothing. Slight changes in punctuation can produce two entirely different meanings:

1. Woman, without her man, is nothing.
 2. Woman. Without her, man is nothing.
- Dialogue can further complicate things, because the rules get bent, depending on how you feel the phrasing should be. Since punctuation's sole reason for being is to let the reader know how you want your sentences read, when it happens to be a person speaking, no two of us will agree. And probably none of us are wrong.

According to Webster

comma

- 1 : a punctuation mark, used especially as a mark of separation within the sentence
- 2 : PAUSE, INTERVAL
- 3 : any of several nymphalid butterflies (genus *Polygonia*) with a silvery comma-shaped mark on the underside of the hind wings