



Thistledown
Press

FALL
2024

Welcome to a new season of ThistleDown Press.

Our lead title is *Because Somebody Asked Me To*, a selection of nonfiction prose from the iconic Prairie writer Guy Vanderhaeghe that will resonate with anyone interested in Canadian literature. My favourite is “An Innocent’s Excellent Adventure,” in which the author describes a teenage visit to Toronto in 1967, where he and a friend, neatly dressed in sports jackets and ties, attend a concert at the O’Keefe Centre featuring the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead. Alas, they realize they have fatally misunderstood the dress code when they find themselves in a sea of tie dye, India print, and long hair, while “an amoebic light show queasily pulsed behind the bands.” It just so happens that I was at that very same concert, equally inappropriately attired in my grade 9 back-to-school dress and white knee socks! Vanderhaeghe’s wit and wisdom shines throughout this collection.

First time author Jo-Ann Wallace is a retired English prof who has crafted an unflinching memoir called *A Life in Pieces*. The book literally is just that—a selection of short pieces that combine retrospection, analysis, wonderment, and wry humour. The subjects range from the unexpected gift of a suede miniskirt to Virginia Woolf’s deployment of the comma, and it all adds up to a courageous account of the fully examined life of one very wise and thoughtful woman.

A middle grade novel by Leanne Shirliffe rounds out the season. *The Genius Hour Project* is a wise and generous and humane narrative of a school year in the life of a young girl named Frazzy as she faces the challenge of friendship and a crush, schoolwork and family life, bullying and a family mental health crisis, all while trying to find her own place in the world. It’s an absorbing and life-affirming narrative for readers of any age. I know I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I’m a grandmother!

You’d be wise to check out all three of these titles.

JoAnn McCaig
Publisher
ThistleDown Press



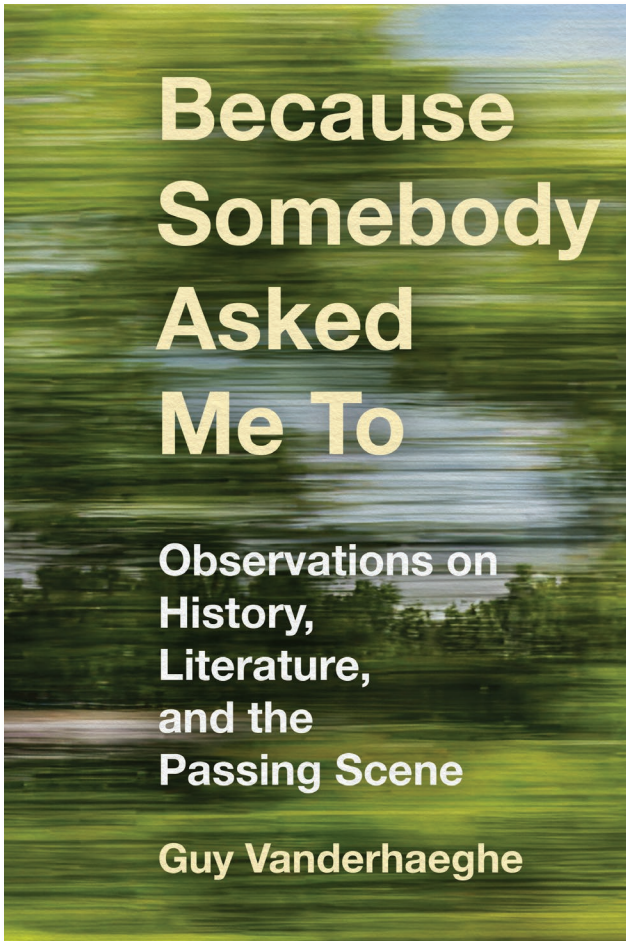
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Conseil des arts
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Publication: September 17, 2024
\$25.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 268 pages
ISBN 9781771872584
LITERARY COLLECTIONS / Essays
Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Guy Vanderhaeghe is a three-time winner of the Governor's-General Award for English language fiction for his collections of short stories, *Man Descending* and *Daddy Lenin*, and for his novel, *The Englishman's Boy*, which was also shortlisted for the Giller Prize and The International Dublin Literary Award. His novel, *The Last Crossing*, was a winner of the CBC's Canada Reads Competition. *August into Winter*, his most recent novel, won the Saskatchewan Book Award for Fiction and the Glengarry Book Award and was shortlisted for the Writers' Trust Atwood Gibson Fiction Prize. He has also received the Timothy Findley Prize, the Harbourfront Literary Prize, and the Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Prize, all given for a body of work.

Because Somebody Asked Me To: Observations on History, Literature, and the Passing Scene

by Guy Vanderhaeghe



Canadian literary great Guy Vanderhaeghe's eclectic and wryly insightful collection of nonfiction pieces spans his forty-year writing career.

Many editors and publishers over the years have asked Guy Vanderhaeghe for his thoughts on books and writers, on history, literature, and his own specialty, the historical novel. *Because Somebody Asked Me To* has all the hallmarks of the author's fiction: it is intelligent, wise, wry, and a pleasure to read. These essays, reviews, and occasional pieces are about the difficult craft of fiction, about growing up on the prairies, and about the struggle to find his own voice as a writer, as well as about novels by writers he deeply admires. And, throughout, he casts a bemused eye on the entire human comedy.

In 1982, when Guy Vanderhaeghe's first book appeared, Canadian literature was beginning to be recognized at home and abroad as culturally engaging and significant. *Because Somebody Asked Me To* gives readers a glimpse into those beginnings and how they shaped the author and his generation of fiction writers. The book also examines how the Canadian literary scene has shifted during the course of his career—the economic, societal, and cultural changes that have made the old world of writing and publishing scarcely recognizable. *Because Somebody Asked Me To* invites readers to ponder the transformations Canadian writing has undergone, where it is now, and where it might go from here.

Praise for *Because Somebody Asked Me To*:

"This marvelous stash of nonfiction reveals Guy Vanderhaeghe's full palette. All his strengths are visible whether in a review, a speech or an essay. Reading this volume, I felt all my circuitry light up like a flash of fireflies, as Nadine Gordimer would say. I'm just so glad somebody asked him to."

—Shelagh Rogers, former CBC host of "The Next Chapter"

Praise for *August Into Winter*:

"Guy Vanderhaeghe is simply a wonderful writer."

—Richard Ford

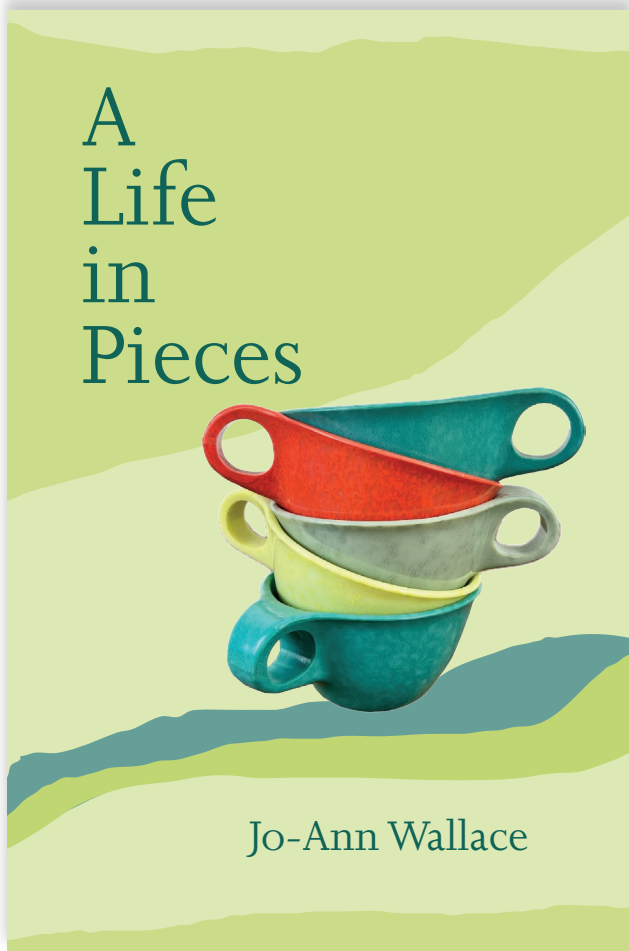
"*August into Winter* ... is by turns beautiful and stunningly violent ... It's a breathtaking achievement."

—*Quill & Quire*

"*August Into Winter* is an epic in miniature that reminds us why we go on living and loving in a world veering from one crisis to the next."

—*Prairie Fire Magazine*





Publication: August 27, 2024
\$ 24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 162 pages
ISBN 9781771872560
BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Memoirs
Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Jo-Ann Wallace is an Emeritus Professor in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. In her younger years, her poetry appeared in several now defunct periodicals, including *The Canadian Forum*. Her scholarly work focused on little known progressive movements and women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More recently, her literary non-fiction has appeared in venues like the *London Review of Books*, the *Literary Review of Canada*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She lives in Victoria, BC with her husband and their rambunctious dog, Bodhi.

A Life in Pieces

by Jo-Ann Wallace



With fresh, understated wisdom, *A Life in Pieces* explores a woman's entire life, without ever forgetting the shadow of mortality trailing every one of us.

This often lyrical and always thought-provoking memoir asks questions that confront many of us: what do we know, for sure, about our childhoods? Does a lively imagination enrich a life or blind us to opportunities? What choices shaped the path our lives have followed? In thirty short chapters, Jo-Ann Wallace take us on a journey from girlhood to elderhood, from one conundrum to another, with the crackle of synaptic energy flashing in the gaps—in what isn't revealed, isn't told.

The book parachutes us into working-class English Montreal in the 1950s and 1960s, into young womanhood in Toronto in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then into professional life in Edmonton from the 1980s through the 2000s. "White Swan, Black Swan" delves into childhood games, and how the subconscious power dynamic between a younger and an older sister lets their imaginations fly free of their small shared bedroom. "Melmac" starts with that quintessentially mid-century dinnerware rattling around in an old motorhome as the author ponders the obsessive collecting of objects as a quirky coping strategy, an outlet for the stresses of contemporary working life. "Whimsy" takes us from the classic Jimmy Stewart movie "Harvey," with its 6 foot 3 ½ inch rabbit to her own imaginary childhood friend, a Scottie dog, and to a present friend who will not watch any movie based in "whimsy." What dangers arise, the author wonders, when imaginations go unexamined, and unexercised.

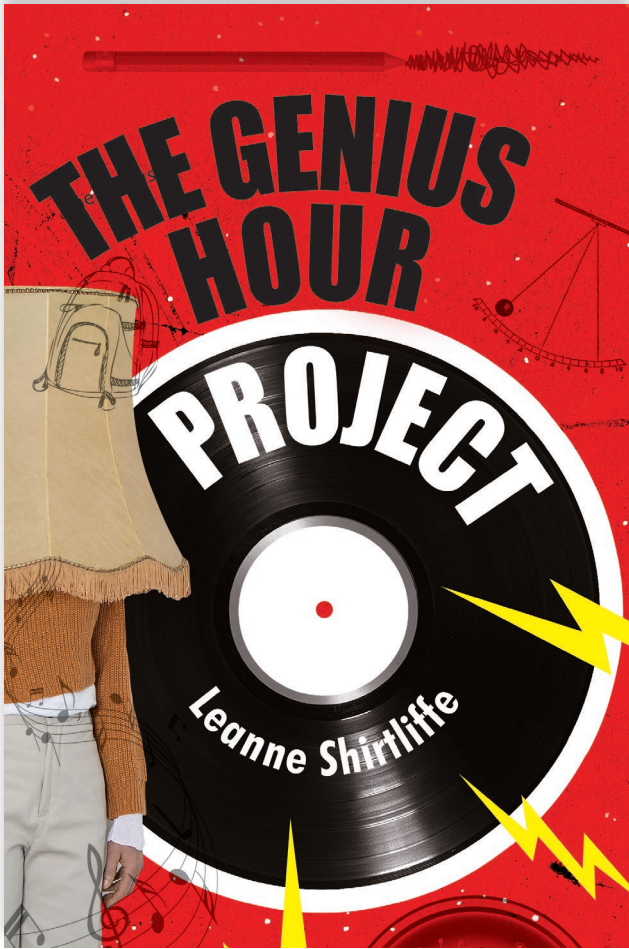
The many disparate pieces of the author's life are like an intricately worked mosaic, while the title, *A Life in Pieces*, foreshadows the final chapters that unfold with tenderness and awe in the wake of a cancer diagnosis.

Praise for *A Life in Pieces*:

"Completely absorbing and affecting, *A Life in Pieces* follows the arc of a lifespan to an unwaveringly clear-eyed completion. Understated yet luminous, conversational but penetrating, these essays bring back a generation's hunger for self-definition, and attest to Wallace's own realization of a life in letters."
—Judith Kalman, author of *Called to Testify: The Big Story in My Small Life*

"These short essays are whimsical in the best sense of the word. They chart a life filled with a wry acceptance of things, from the possibility that our dogs may all be there to greet us after death, to the fact that her mother never really liked her. This memoir . . . will make you want to buy Melmac, watch Elvira Madigan, and go to Mars."
—Ted Bishop, author of *The Social Life of Ink*





Publication: August 6, 2024
\$16.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 250 pages
ISBN 9781771872577
JUVENILE FICTION / School & Education
Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Leanne Shirliffe is a writer and teacher who has lived in Canada, Thailand, and Bahrain. The author of five picture books for children and two nonfiction books for adults, *The Genius Hour Project* is her debut middle-grade novel. When she is not writing, she can be found teaching teenagers, going to garage sales, and listening to an eclectic collection of music. Leanne now lives with her family in Calgary, Alberta.

The Genius Hour Project

by Leanne Shirliffe



Eleven-year-old Frazzy is mostly coping with being bullied and not always fitting in at school, until every aspect of her life goes haywire.

Frazzy likes to chat her way through classes, distracting her best friend Mel, while inwardly speculating about whether Ebrahim, the boy she has a crush on, really does like her—all without attracting any more attention from the bully Jake who humiliates her whenever possible. Then the teacher springs a yearlong assignment on her class called The Genius Hour Project, while at the same time Frazzy discovers that Mel's parents might be divorcing and Mel might be going to a different school. And just when she needs him most, Frazzy's stay-at-home-dad disappears into a major depression.

The idea behind the Genius Hour Project is for kids to “let their inner genius shine,” but the thing is, Frazzy doesn't want her schoolmates to know that what she really cares about is vintage music and finding deals on old records at garage sales with her dad—too totally uncool. So she chooses a really dull, normal Genius Hour Project, something that she thinks will please her teacher: women politicians. She'll start close to home, with her mom, the long-suffering mayor of Riverview.

The problem is that nobody, not her teacher or the principal or her friends, gets behind Frazzy's project. So, if trying to be more normal is not the solution, what is? Over the months that follow, though she is worried about her dad, and even more distracted than usual at school, Frazzy slowly finds a way to be her best and brightest self.

Praise for *The Genius Hour Project*:

“Frazzy has a chatty and distinctive voice, and doesn't mind laughing at herself. Her class at Riverview Elementary and Middle School is made up of goofs and weirdos. Her homelife is a stew of music, laughter, and popcorn. What's not to like?”

—Richard Scrimger, author of *Weerdest Day Ever!* and *Downside Up*

“Zany, heartfelt and bubbling with creativity, *The Genius Hour Project* delivers its charming story right to the heart.”

—Arthur Slade, author of *The Hunchback Assignments* and *Dust*.





What Fills Your House Like Smoke

by E. McGregor

Publication: April 9, 2024

\$19.95 paperback | 6 x 8 | 90 pages

ISBN 9781771872522

POETRY / Subjects & Themes / Family / Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island

In this debut poetry collection, E. McGregor combines the lore of family history with personal memory, vividly parsing patterns of inheritance, particularly through the maternal line.

What Fills Your House Like Smoke begins and ends at the deathbed of the writer's Métis grandmother. In between, McGregor composes an incomplete and wildly imaginative biography of her grandmother, interrogated by family photographs, stories, and the scant paper trail she left behind.

The Rasmussen Papers

by Connie Gault

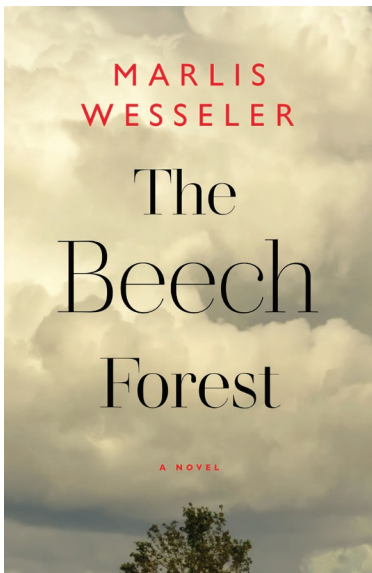
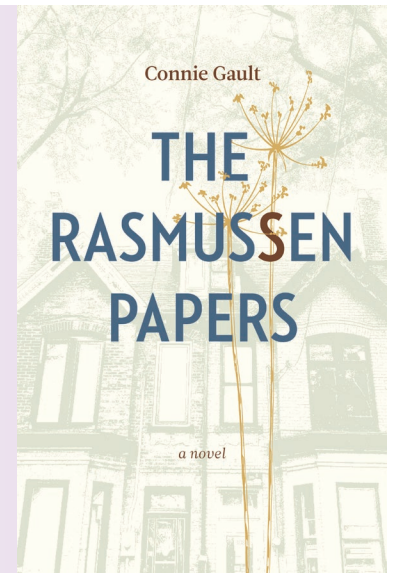
Publication: May 14, 2024

\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 192 pages

ISBN 9781771872539

FICTION / Literary / Psychological

The Rasmussen Papers is a brilliant reply to Henry James' *The Aspern Papers*. Connie Gault flips James' story on its head and slides it into contemporary Toronto's Cabbagetown, among the marginalized and dispossessed, people the narrator studies as intently as she studies everyone she meets—until a confrontation on a streetcar makes her reconsider the limits of what you can know of another's story, and how hidden we all are, especially from ourselves.



The Beech Forest

by Marlis Wessler

Publication: June 4, 2024

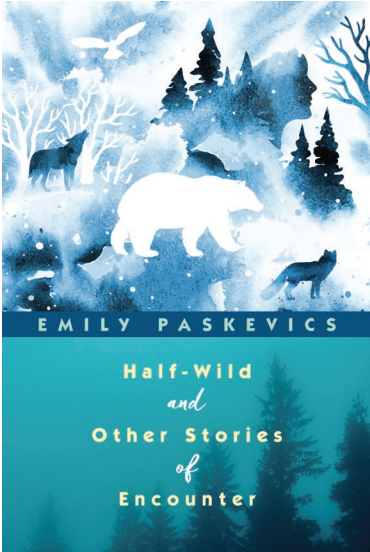
\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 222 pages

ISBN 9781771872546

FICTION / Literary / Small Town & Rural

This wry, perceptive novel is about secrets and silences; about estrangements between family members, and gaps in understanding between well-intentioned people who struggle to bridge the distances between one another. *The Beech Forest* looks into the dark corners of the human heart, and brings us back out into the light of day with humour and compassion.





Half-Wild and Other Stories of Encounter by Emily Paskevics

Publication: September 5, 2023
\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 156 pages
ISBN 9781771872485
FICTION/Nature & the Environment/Short Stories

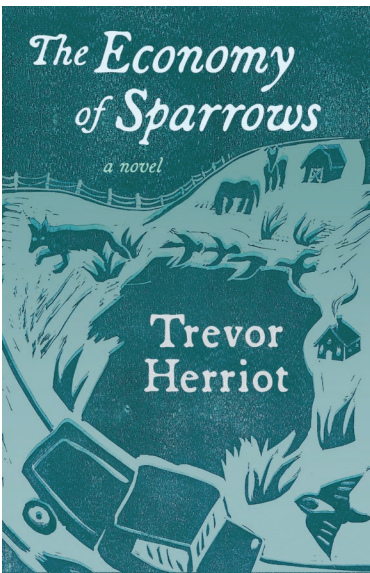
In *HalfWild and Other Stories of Encounter*, a startling debut short story collection by a new Ontario writer, intergenerational relationships unfold in a context of environmental change and degradation.

Emily Paskevics takes her characters—mothers, daughters, fathers, sisters—into the wilderness to lose themselves in their primal nature . . . or to find what they’ve always been missing as they struggle in a borderland between irrevocable environmental change and hope for ecological connection and healing.

The Heathens and the Dragon: A 13th-Century Adventure by Kate A. Boorman

Publication: September 5, 2023
\$16.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 300 pages
ISBN 9781771872478
YOUNG ADULT FICTION / Historical / Medieval / Action & Adventure / Social Situations / Values
Ages 9-13+

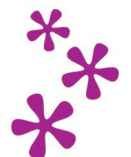
From award-winning author Kate A. Boorman comes her first middle grade historical novel, set in France in the Middle Ages at a time of great religious upheaval. *The Heathens and the Dragon: A 13th-Century Adventure* stars twelve-year-old Elodie, a resourceful guardian to her little brother Bertran and his often willful pet chicken Codet. Together with Joie, a young troubadour, they perform for their very survival.



The Economy of Sparrows by Trevor Herriot

Publication: September 12, 2023
\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 264 pages
ISBN 9781771872461
FICTION / Literary / Nature & the Environment

This debut novel by Trevor Herriot, one of Canada’s foremost writer-naturalists, is the richly observed story of Nell Rowan, who has inherited her family’s prairie farmstead and returned there to live after many decades away. Nell is increasingly obsessed by a 19th-century bird collector while haunted by memories of her mother’s disappearance.



a beautiful rebellion

poems

rita bouvier



a beautiful rebellion

by Rita Bouvier

Publication: April 10, 2023

\$19.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 72 pages

ISBN 9781771872348

POETRY / Canadian / Indigenous

This evocative new poetry collection speaks with a fierce tenderness of many aspects of the poet's life: a childhood spent on the banks of the Churchill River, the death of a beloved one, the struggle to try to find forgiveness for wrongs done and the weariness of trying to redress those wrongs. And, most poignantly, a beautiful rebellion reaches one hand back to Louis Riel and one hand forward to future Métis generations.

Gordie's Skate

by Bill Waiser; illustrated by Leanne Franson

Publication: April 15, 2023

\$14.95 paperback | 10.25 x 8.5 | 24 pages

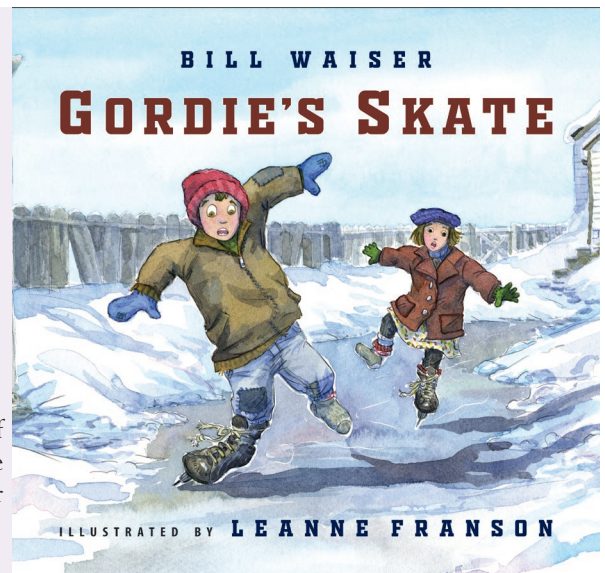
ISBN 9781771872355

\$21.95 hardcover | 10.25 x 8.5 | 24 pages

ISBN 9781771872393

JUVENILE NONFICTION / Biography & Autobiography / Sports & Recreation

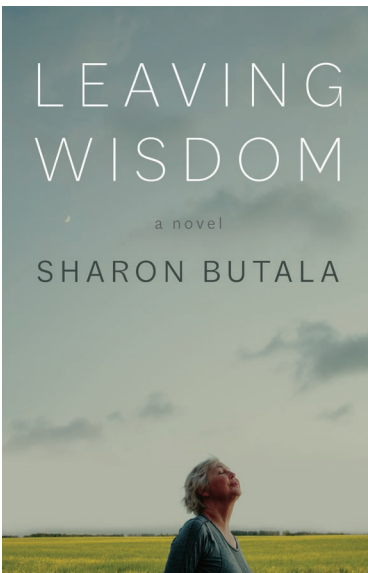
Set in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression, this is the story of hockey legend Gordie Howe and his first experience with skating. The book is charmingly illustrated in full colour by Leanne Franson. Bill Waiser is a popular historian and Governor-General's-Award-winning author.



LEAVING
WISDOM

a novel

SHARON BUTALA



Leaving Wisdom

Sharon Butala

Publication: May 30, 2023

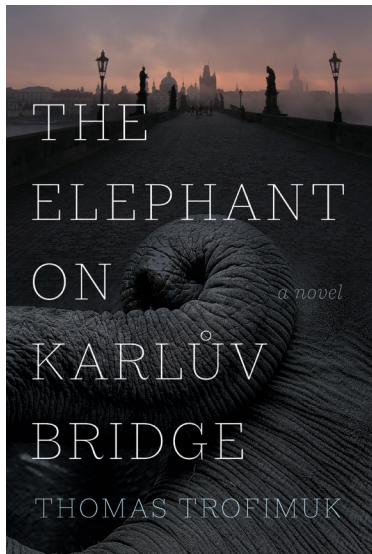
\$24.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 282 pages

ISBN 9781771872362

FICTION / Literary

Sharon Butala's new novel begins with the wrong kind of bang when retiring social worker Judith falls on the ice on the way to her retirement party. The debilitating concussion that follows seems to shake loose a confusing whirl of memories.





The Elephant on Karlův Bridge

by Thomas Trofimuk

Publication: August 15, 2022
\$24.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 352 pages
ISBN 9781771872256
FICTION / Literary

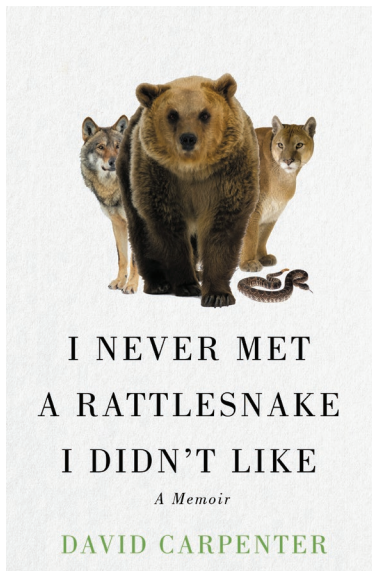
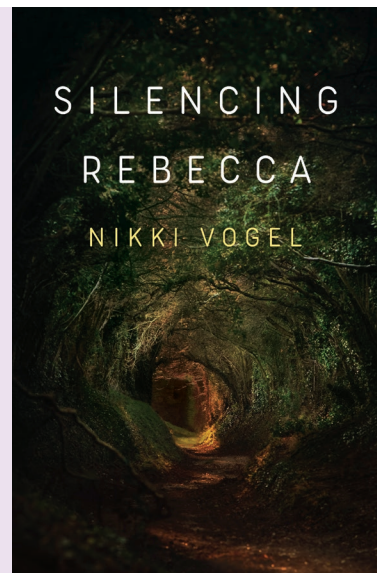
Set in Prague and narrated with great panache by the 600-year-old Charles Bridge, this novel begins with an elephant named Sál escaping the Prague Zoo. As the elephant moves through the beautiful Czech city, the lives of the men and women she meets are altered by the encounter. Each character is at a crossroads, and desperately seeking the wisdom they need to wrestle with profound questions—how to live, how to love, who to love, how to heal.

Silencing Rebecca

by Nikki Vogel

Publication: August 31, 2022
\$18.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 240 pages
ISBN 9781771872263
YOUNG ADULT FICTION/Literary/Magical/Religious/Jewish

In this genre-bending debut YA novel combining elements of horror, magic realism, and realistic fiction, Rebecca Waldmann's sheltered life as an Orthodox Jewish teen in Toronto is shattered when her father moves them to Edmonton, where she is plunged into the worldly life of a public high school. Rebecca doesn't just defy the strictures of her ultraorthodox religion by wearing tight jeans and flirting with a non-Jewish boy. She discovers to her horror that she has undergone a change that makes puberty look easy—she's been transformed into a golem!



I Never Met a Rattlesnake I Didn't Like: a Memoir

David Carpenter

Publication: August 31, 2022
\$24.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 230 pages
ISBN 9781771872270
NATURE/Essays/Personal Memoir

David Carpenter's collection of essays explores a city boy's love of the wild, a passion that has enriched his life from boyhood. At 80, this irrepressible Saskatchewan raconteur examines his intense fascination with predators large and small, and his awe in the face of the variety of creatures that may be out to get us—or who are out to get one another.



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