



**Thistledown
Press**

**FALL
2025**



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A Message from the Publisher:

Fall 2025 at Thistledown is all about storytelling.

A Snake and a Feathered Bird is an astonishingly deft first novel by Angie Ellis, set on Vancouver Island in the late 1880s. The gripping narrative follows the journey of a boy named Ben as he slowly uncovers the truth of his life story amid the rough and tumble of a new community ruled by poverty and greed. Only after many adventures and mishaps does Ben arrive at a place of belonging and self knowledge.

The Discovery of Finnegan Wilde is a rollicking tale set in early 20th-century Ireland that chronicles the quest of a young orphan girl to unravel the mystery of her origins. This novel for middle grade and older readers begins in the gritty streets of 1913 Dublin, takes us back in time to the hidden history of a medieval monk, and then returns to Finnegan's discovery of the magical truth of her own life story.

In Wilfred Burton's whimsical tale *Kohkum's Royal Bannock*, a grandmother and her grandson prepare for a visit from the Queen, prompting a heroic community effort to provide this special Métis dish for the feast. Warm and captivating illustrations from Hawlii Pichette bring this delightful story to vivid life, and Michif translation creates a bridge between two cultures.

We hope you enjoy these powerful and engaging stories.

JoAnn McCaig
Publisher
Thistledown Press



Canada Council
for the Arts

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Saskatchewan

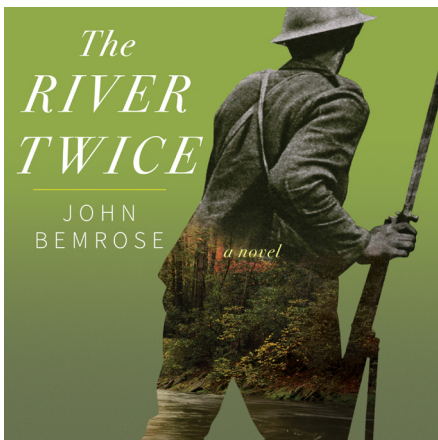
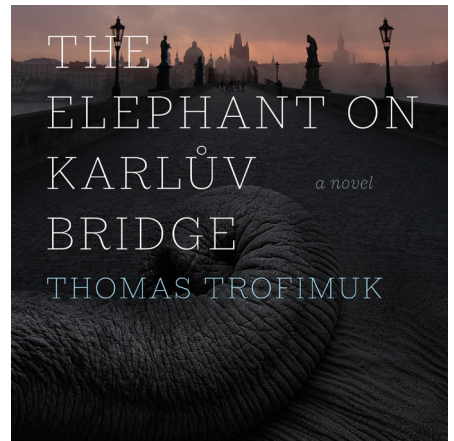
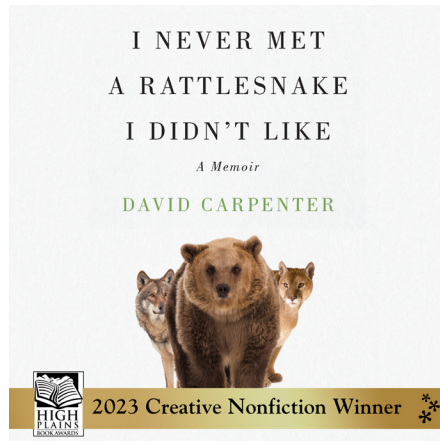
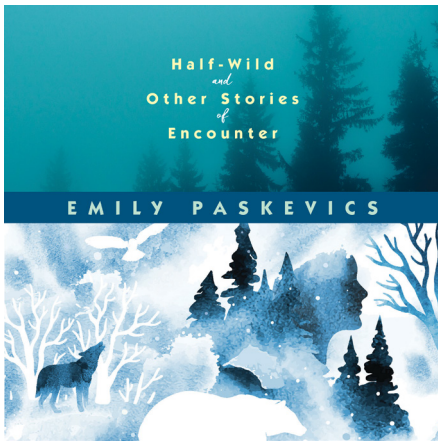
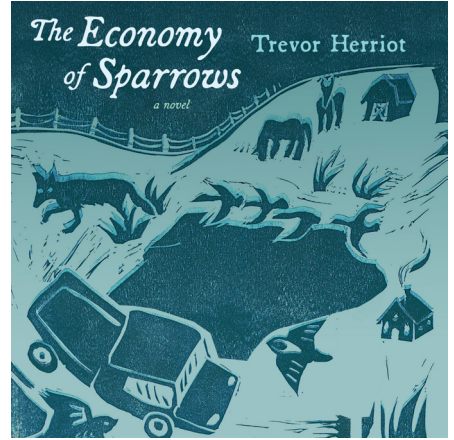
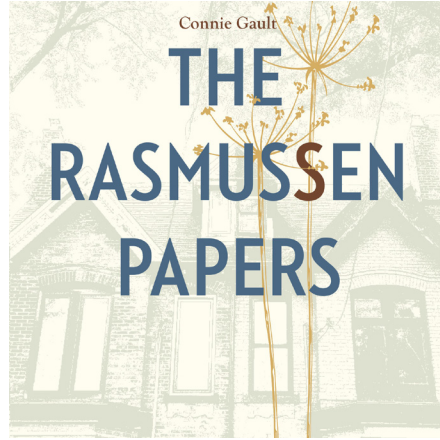
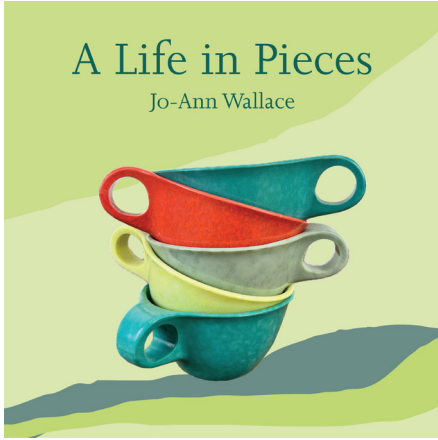
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Thistledown Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support of SK Arts, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the Government of Canada for its publishing program.

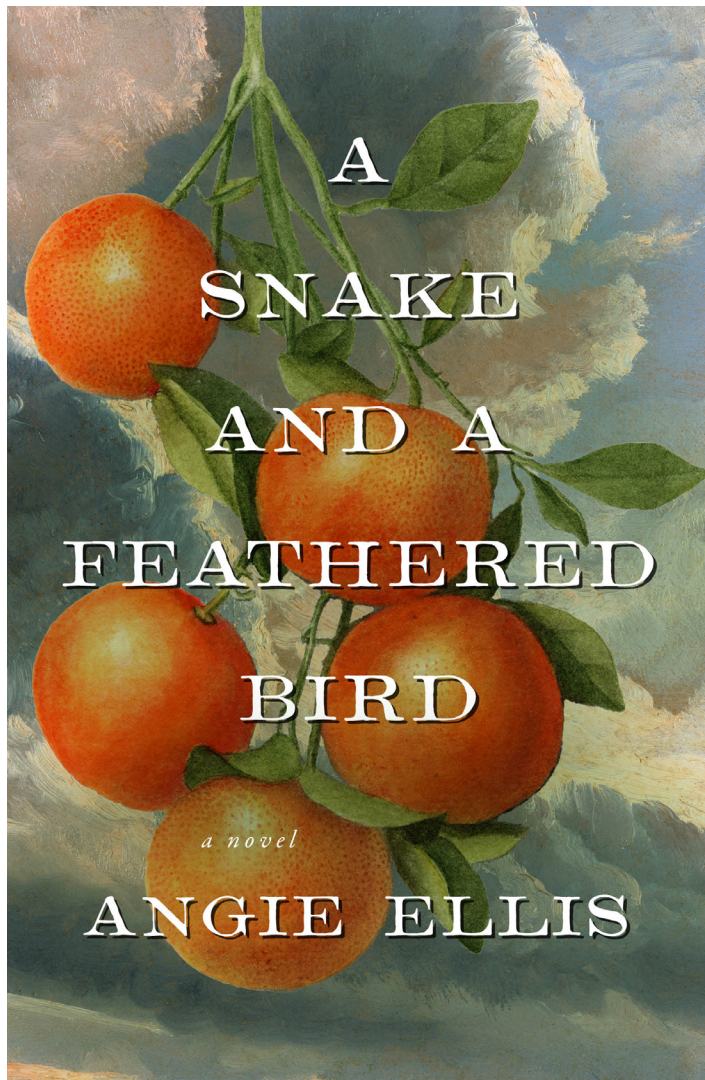
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A Snake and a Feathered Bird



By Angie Ellis

This atmospheric coming-of-age tale follows Ben, a sensitive boy struggling to unravel his family history while caught in the vortex of other people's lives.

Vancouver Island, 1875. Three-year-old Ben comes to live with Agda and her volatile husband James in their small wilderness cabin. Entranced by the lushly overarching rainforest, he helps his loving adoptive *mere* in the garden, learns his letters at the kitchen table and wonders what it would be like to go to school. When James takes Ben, age nine, on a whisky run, the boy is plunged into the rough world of a ramshackle coastal city. Left alone in a canoe he can barely paddle, he is saved from drowning by a man who is later found dead in the same sea. The frightened boy waits for James to reappear while in the care of James's sweet but listless niece Lily. When James and Ben return to the cabin, they find Agda injured and limping badly. In a few days, Agda is dead. And grieving Ben suspects James of being involved in both sudden deaths.

The nearby Stenhouse farm becomes Ben's refuge, where he helps with chores and grows up alongside their lively children, including spiky, truth-telling Effie. When James dies, seventeen-year-old Ben is offered a home there as the hired man. First, though, he makes the wilderness trek to the city, to give Lily a bequest from James. With the encroaching rainforest and the sea always ready to reclaim the poor streets and crude dwellings of the tumultuous city, Ben gets hopelessly entangled with Lily and other new friends.

The longer Ben stays, the more he learns about his birth mother—and the farther he is from the Stenhouse farm. Only when he knows who he really is, and frees himself from everyone else's plans for him, can he act on his own desires and claim his place in the world.

Publication: October 7, 2025

\$24.95 Paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 324 pages

ISBN: 9781771872812

FICTION / Literary

FICTION / Historical / 19th Century / General

FICTION / Coming of Age

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

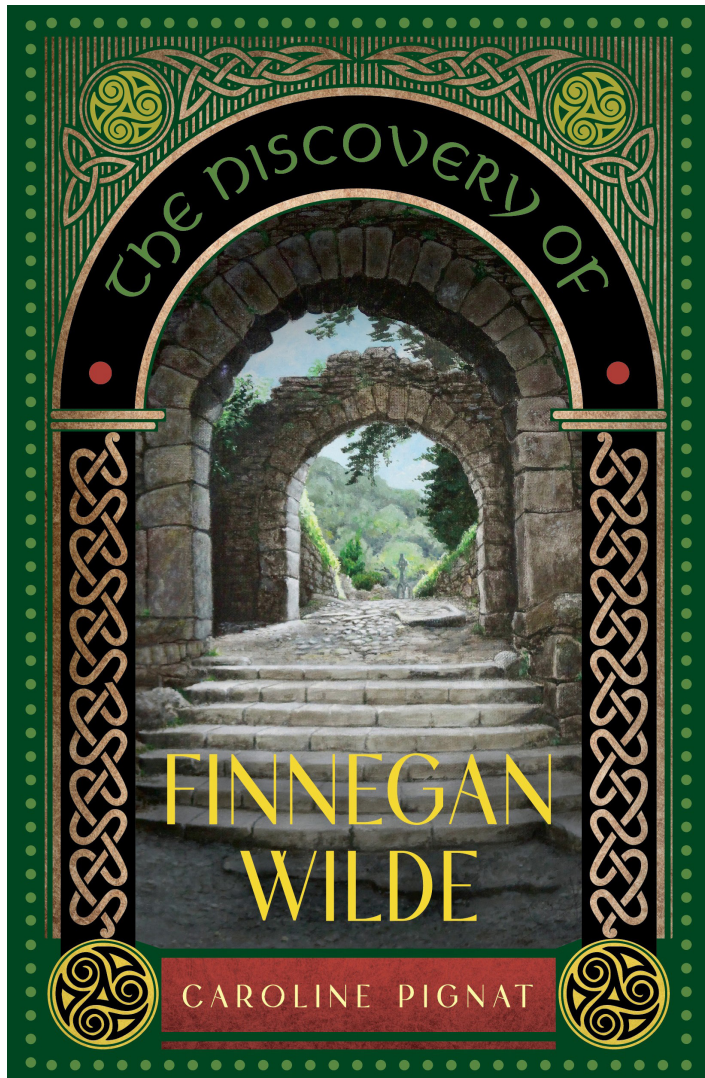
Angie Ellis is a writer from Vancouver Island whose short fiction has appeared in *Narrative, Story, The Fiddlehead, Grain*, and other literary journals. Her stories have won the Masters Review Short Story Award, Best of the Net, and Best Small Fictions, and two were longlisted for the CBC Short Story Prize. She has received grants from both the Canada Council for the Arts and the BC Arts Council. A graduate of the Humber School for Writers Program, she has also attended the Humber Summer Workshop. She lives in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island.

Praise for Past Work

"Sisters," Winner of the 2023-2024 Winter Short Story Award for New Writers

"The Sisters' won me over in its very first sentence. Language, imagery, rhythm, all of these are tools for spell casting, just as much as the everyday household magic which these characters seem to have access to . . . and the pace at which we learn more about each of the sisters, the ways in which the story reveals them to us, is delicious."

—Guest Judge, Kelly Link, author of *The Book of Love*



The Discovery of Finnegan Wilde



By Caroline Pignat

A thrilling novel of self-discovery that is part adventure, part mystery, and part Celtic myth, set in Dublin in 1913.

Fifteen-year-old Finnegan Wilde steals to survive. Always on the run from gangs and police, Finn is also fleeing her own mysterious past, glimpsed only through nightmares and an unusual Celtic mark on her arm. When, in a chance encounter outside the museum, she scores a journal filled with strange diagrams, maps, and a drawing identical to her mark, Finn hungers for more than the next meal. She wants answers, and more than anything, she wants to find her family.

Eddie Moore, a young apprentice archaeologist, has spent months trying to decipher an ancient manuscript he and his father excavated from a bog. The Moores believe it was written by Tomas, a 9th century monk, and that it holds the clue to finding the legendary Cauldron of Plenty, one of four Treasures of Ireland. But when Eddie's father is seriously injured by a gang in an attempted robbery, Eddie alone must find the Cauldron.

When their search brings them together, Finn and Eddie realize the mark on her arm and his ancient manuscript are connected. Finn doesn't trust this awkward scholar from the rich side of town. Eddie is just as suspicious of this wild girl with no home, no past, and no rules. But if they can work together, perhaps—as Tomas hoped—they will make the greatest discovery of all.

Three voices—those of Finnegan, Eddie, and Tomas—intertwine like a Celtic knot that readers will delight in unravelling to the very last page.

Publication: August 19, 2025

\$16.95 Paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 330 pages

ISBN: 9781771872874

JUVENILE FICTION / Historical / Exploration & Discovery

JUVENILE FICTION / Legends, Myths, Fables / General

JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Self-Esteem & Self-Reliance

Ages 12-14

Distribution: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Irish-Canadian author and educator Caroline Pignat is the recipient of two Governor General's Awards for Children's Literature (*Greener Grass*, 2009; *The Gospel Truth*, 2015). She explores complex themes through her character driven stories and her work is hailed by the Canadian Children's Book Centre as "historical fiction at its best!" Pignat immerses her readers in rich and varied historical settings, drawing them close to characters who embody resiliency, empathy, and hope. She lives in Ottawa.

Praise for Past Works:

The Gospel Truth

"Caroline Pignat's *The Gospel Truth* is the powerful and poignant story of 16-year-old Phoebe, a slave girl in 1858 Virginia. Written in lyrical and elegant free verse, it is an unflinching look at the brutality of slavery and Phoebe's struggle for freedom and truth. Ultimately, this is a story of hope."

—Governor General's Award Jury

"Telling the story from multiple points of view, she provides a nuanced, multifaceted perspective on truth and freedom, and a realistic rendering of that time in history . . . Moving, lyrical and intriguing, this is a story that will captivate readers of all ages."

—CCBC Amy Mathers Teen Book Award Judges

Greener Grass

"Ride with the powerful lilt of style and you'll feel the terrible heartbeat of old Famine Ireland herself! Pignat is a winner!"

—Brian Doyle, Author

Kohkum's Royal Bannock

by Wilfred Burton; illustrated by Hawlii Pichette. Michif translation by Irma Klyne and Larry Fayant



This beautifully illustrated Métis picture book is a feast for the eyes and a tickle for the funny bone, as Kohkum cooks up a HUGE order of bannock in her own kitchen, for the Queen and 299 guests!

This lively and whimsical tale begins with a letter from the government asking Kohkum to cook bannock for the Royal visit. Kohkum's grandson Xavier is as excited as she is, until they do the math and are shocked to learn that they are cooking not just for the Queen but for her entourage and guests too. A mad scramble ensues, with a rushed trip to the grocery store to buy a ridiculous amount of flour and milk, and a perilous trip home with the car stuffed with supplies and Xavier riding on the roof. Several aunts come to the rescue, helping with bannock assembly and sharing in the excitement of cooking for the Queen.

Written by an educator, this story provides many opportunities to count in English and Michif, with many laughs along the way as Kohkum, aunts, and Xavier scramble to cook the bannock in time for the Queen's visit. Boldly colourful, humorous illustrations by illustrator Hawlii Pichette bring this entertaining story to life. Full translation makes this book ideal for in-class cultural learning and Michif language acquisition.

Publication: August 5, 2025

\$14.95 Softcover | 10.5 x 9 | 32 pages

\$21.95 Hardcover | 10.5 x 9 | 32 pages

Softcover ISBN: 9781771872744

Hardcover ISBN: 9781771872751

JUVENILE FICTION / Indigenous / Family Life

JUVENILE FICTION / Concepts / Counting & Numbers

JUVENILE FICTION / Humorous Stories

Ages 4-9+ / PreK-Grade 4

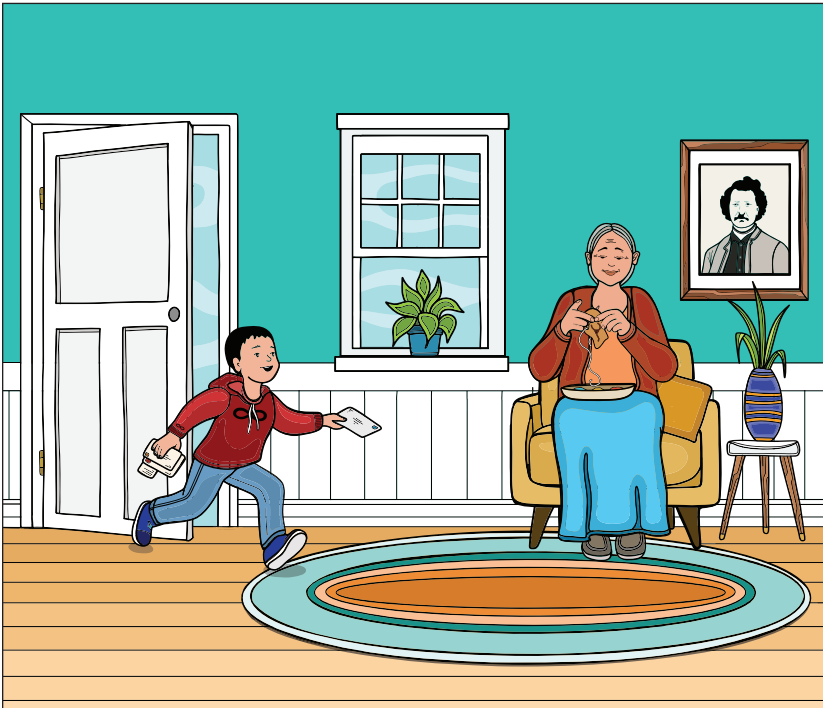
Distributor: UTP Distribution

Praise for Past Work

Dancing in My Bones

"I found this book insightful and entertaining . . . a good read for young people and adults as well . . . I recommend this book for adults as well . . . This book is perfect for a Moushoom to Nooshishim bedtime story where I see both falling asleep with smiles on their faces."

—Arnold Ibister



“Kohkum! We’ve got mail!” shouted Xavier.

There was always excitement when they got mail. If there were flyers, Kohkum sat and pointed out the things on sale. If there was a cheque, Xavier knew they’d go shopping and he’d get a treat. But this time, it was different.

“It’s . . . from the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan,” read Xavier.

“What do they want from this old Michif woman?” asked Kohkum.

“Kohkum! La mail dayawnawn!” taypayway Xavier.

Toultawn oohpipayihowuk la mail ka ayawchik. Tawnishpi lee flyers ka takoshikik, Kohkum apiw akwa itwayhum kaykwy ka wayhtukihitayk. Ishpi aen check ka mishkukhik, Xavier kishkayhtum ka do natahikaychik akwa kwaykway ka meekowiw. Maka akwa pahkawn.

“Si . . . ouschi li Gouvarneur di Saskatchewan,” amishchikayw Xavier.

“Kaykwy ka dawayhtuhkik ouschi awa la vyay Michif?” kwaychihkaymo Kohkum.

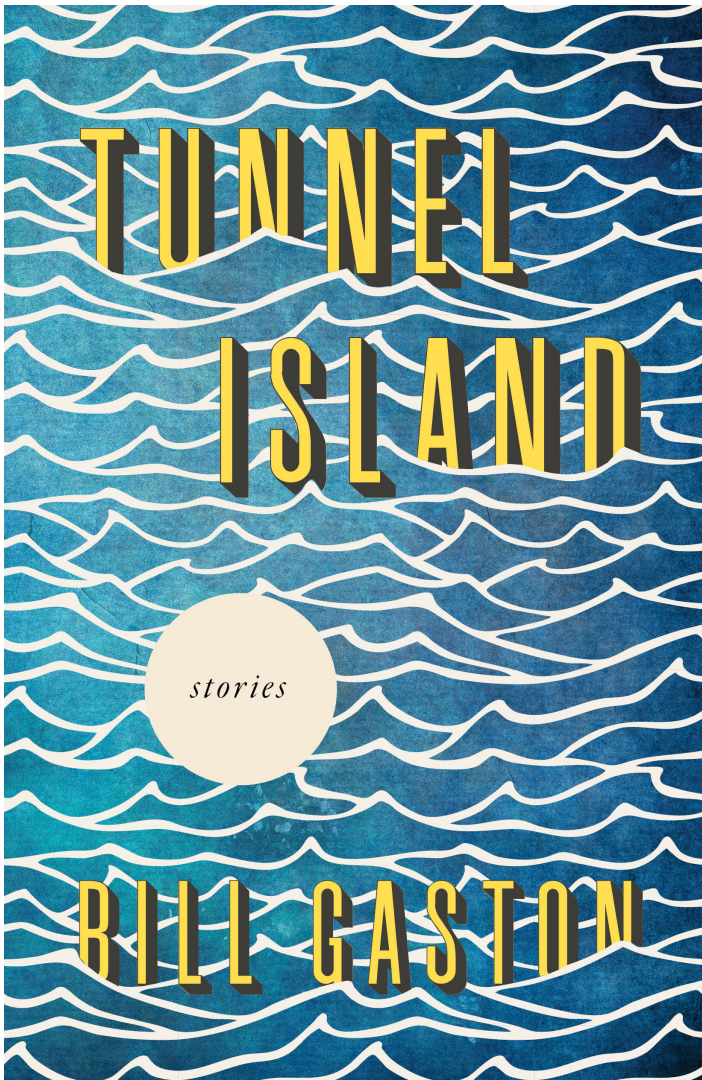
Kohkum’s Royal Bannock, interior (pg. 2-3). by Wilfred Burton; illustrated by Hawlii Pichette. Michif translation by Irma Klyne and Larry Fayant

About the Author

Author Wilfred Burton, a proud Michif, grew up in the Midnight Lake area of Saskatchewan. He was an elementary teacher, university instructor and literacy coordinator for over 30 years. He is currently retired and spends his time writing, reading, gardening, beading, rug hooking and doing lots of volunteer work in the community. He is a published author of several Métis specific picture books. His love of storytelling, fiddle music and dance came as gifts from his mother, Georgina Nolin. A gift he loves to share with others through presentations and writing. He lives in Saskatoon.

About the Illustrator

Hawlii Pichette is a Mushkego Cree (Treaty 9), urban, mixed-ancestry artist. Her work is deeply influenced by her culture and upbringing and reflects the beautiful interconnections of the natural world. She currently lives in London, Ontario, Canada.



Publication: April 29, 2025

\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 228 pages

ISBN: 9781771872683

FICTION / Short Stories

FICTION / Small Town & Rural

FICTION / Dark Humour / General

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Bill Gaston is the author of seven novels and eight collections of short fiction, including *Sex is Red* and *Mount Appetite*, as well as a book of poems and two memoirs, most recently *Just Let Me Look at You*. His work has been shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Fiction, the Giller Prize, among many other awards, and has won the Victoria/Butler Book Prize, the Writers' Trust Timothy Findley Award (for a body of work, mid-career), the Ethel Wilson Prize for Fiction, and the National Post Book of the Year. He lives on Gabriola Island with his wife, the author Dede Crane.

Tunnel Island: Stories



by Bill Gaston

Set on an island in BC's Salish Sea, *Tunnel Island* is a richly imagined and often darkly hilarious collection of linked stories by short-fiction master Bill Gaston.

Eleven stories feature a cast of characters striving to overcome pasts that often include a catastrophic error. On *Tunnel Island*, moral misjudgments, semi-legal schemes, and antisocial gaffes abound as characters seek a remedy for what ails them: loneliness, heartbreak, grief.

Jack ekes out a living doing odd jobs and minding the estates of absent owners, until he takes a lover's bad advice and rents their houses through Airbnb. A dying woman retains her wry Wiccan sense of humour while lovingly ministered to by her partner—in between his trips to hand out Halloween candy at their door. The almost mystical disappearance of a toddler is revisited years later when her parents remarry in a surreal outdoor ceremony.

Highly original and empathetic, *Tunnel Island* is electrified by dark undercurrents that jolt and illuminate by turns. Bill Gaston's bighearted vision of life on a heavily forested island immerses readers in a world rendered tender and tolerable by human folly and our stumbling attempts at redemption.

Praise for *Tunnel Island*:

"The immense pleasure that *Tunnel Island* gave me came from every possible source: from the lovingly described settings, the unexpected narrative turns, the supple sentences, the close observations . . . What a talent Bill Gaston is! What a master of the craft!"

—Barbara Gowdy, author of *Little Sister* and *The White Bone*

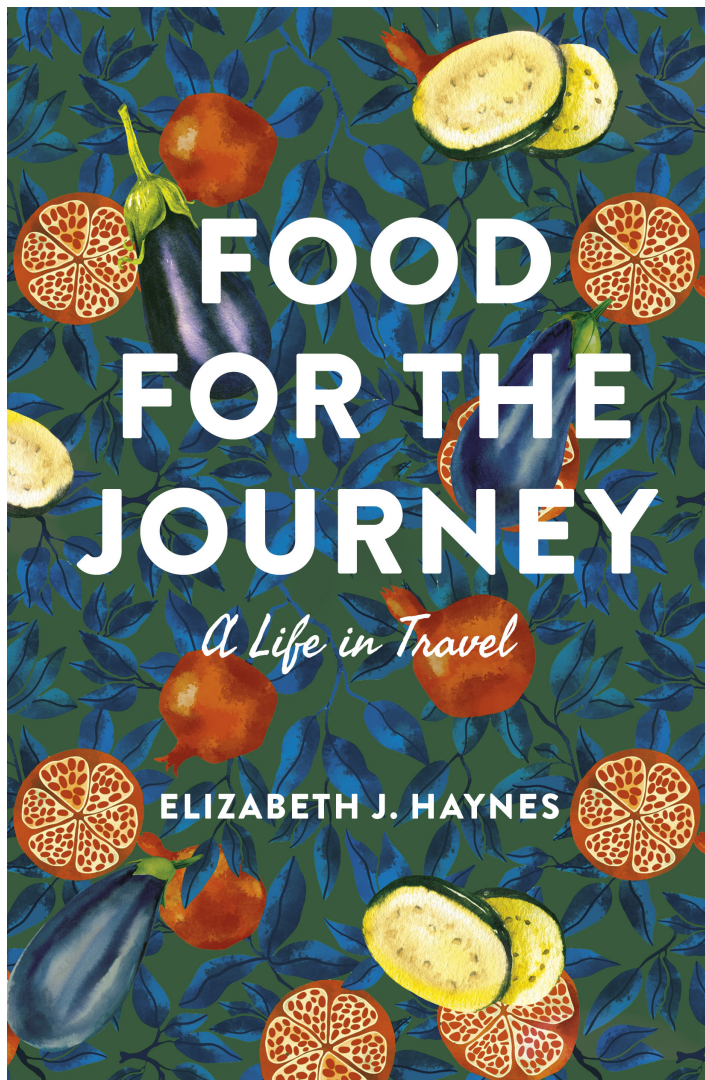
"Bill Gaston's stories are as multifaceted and generous as the complicated, all-too-real characters at their heart. This is a wonderful book. Spend some time on *Tunnel Island*, and you'll never want to leave."

—Steven Price, author of *Lampedusa* and *By Gaslight*

Praise for Past Works:

"Gaston is that rare writer who can peel back the deepest fears of Nature (abandonment, pain, futility) and find a vision of vehement, imperfect beauty."

—Publishers Weekly



Food for the Journey: A Life in Travel



by Elizabeth J. Haynes

In this inspiring memoir rich with the flavours of other cultures, the author journeys by bike, on foot, by bus, plane, and train in her quest to understand the lives of the people she meets.

You know you're not on a typical turista tour when you read, "We stopped for a mid-day lunch of piranha and hiked to a lagoon." This writer's explorations are unpredictable, sometimes perilous, often amusing, and always fascinating. While Elizabeth J. Haynes is an outsider—in the Philippines as a volunteer working with disabled children, at a pig killing in a remote Indonesian village, or even at a family wedding in rural North Carolina—she offers a compassionate view of those around her.

Insights and revelations emerge from stories Haynes tells about the vagaries of the human heart. Cycling with her sister in Cuba, she hopes her sister will find the strength to leave a difficult relationship. On a working trip in Armenia, she recalls a lost love; in Cambodia, in an encounter with a little girl, she faces the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge regime. Like many first-world travellers, she is pained by the want and suffering she witnesses and is moved by the generosity she receives.

As Elizabeth J. Haynes writes, "No one travels alone. No one journeys without help." And sometimes help comes in the form of food—Southern grits with pancakes, Armenian eggplant stuffed with walnuts and pomegranate, grilled guinea pig in Peru—nourishment for the soul of the traveller. This travel memoir is a sumptuous meal with many courses, savoury and sweet.

Publication: May 27, 2025

\$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 204 pages

ISBN: 9781771872690

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Personal Memoirs

TRAVEL / Special Interest / Adventure

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Women

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Elizabeth J. Haynes juggled a career in Speech-Language Pathology with a passion for writing and a lifelong case of wanderlust. Now retired, she writes memoir, fiction, and poetry, and continues to explore the globe. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, most recently *You Look Good for your Age* (University of Alberta Press). Her short fiction collection, *Speak Mandarin not Dialect* (Thistledown Press), was an Alberta Book Award finalist. She has won the Jon Whyte Memorial Essay, a Western Magazine Award and the American Heart Association Award for fiction. Her first novel, *The Errant Husband*, was published in 2021 (Radiant Press). She served as writer in residence for the Calgary Public Library in 2023. She lives in Calgary, Alberta.

Praise for Food for the Journey:

"*Food for the Journey* by Elizabeth J. Haynes takes the reader on inner and outer explorations of exotic locales, sudden friendships, contemporary politics, historical horrors, and acts of kindness. Diverse and often unexpected, Haynes's trips throughout the world offer insights into both the wonders of the natural world and the complexities of human relationships, while exploring the joys and perils of travel off the beaten path."

—Joan Crate, author of the novels *Black Apple* and *Breathing Water*

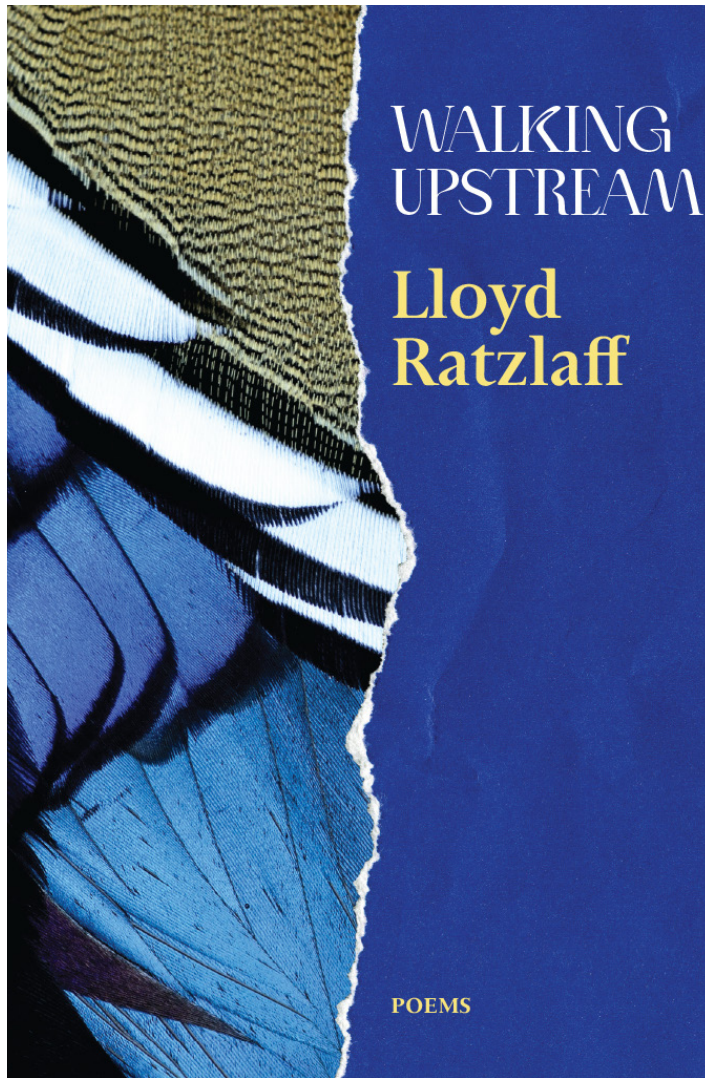
Praise for Past Work:

"*The Errant Husband* is a worthy first novel, notable for a fresh authorial voice that engages readers with the protagonist but still maintains a distance that encourages us to analyze and critique protagonist Thelma."

—*The British Columbia Review*

"Haynes' characters are fully rounded, complex and believable, and the dry humour, rich sensory detail and well-executed suspense make this novel a delight to read."

—Lori Hahnel



Walking Upstream



by Lloyd Ratzlaff

A debut poetry collection, both lyrical and surprisingly playful, about overcoming a harsh evangelical upbringing and seeking consolation from the beauty of the natural world.

This collection by the author of three books of nonfiction takes readers into one man's struggle to escape the corrosive effects of a punishing religion. We meet the small, frightened boy afraid of hell-fire and eternal guilt, and decades later, the man kicking free of the habit of self-excoriation.

There is humour in the observation of the antics of birds, especially magpies and other corvids, and profound humility in the struggle to resist a confining culture.

Excerpt from *Walking Upstream*:

Magpie, I love you more
for your flight and strut
than for your
squawk,
but can't vilify a creature
ten times tougher than I am
and a hell of a lot more handsome.

We walk with the poet-as-flaneur through neighbourhoods and along the river in a small prairie city, observing the incongruities, absurdities, and startling images and sounds of city life. And with the mystic who believes in something far beyond himself, so the beetle he sees on a path is "a little Buddha," and the wind and the flowing river are "irresistible forces," while a pine teaches him "how you move / without going / anywhere."

Publication: April 8, 2025

\$19.95 paperback | 6 x 8 | 78 pages

ISBN: 9781771872706

POETRY / Subjects & Themes / Religious

POETRY / Subjects & Themes / Animals & Nature

POETRY / Canadian

Distributor: UTP Distribution

About the Author

Lloyd Ratzlaff is a former minister, counsellor, and university lecturer who has authored three books of literary nonfiction and edited an anthology of seniors' writings and a children's book. He was a finalist for three Saskatchewan Book Awards, won two Saskatchewan Writers' Guild literary nonfiction awards, and served on the boards of several writing organizations. He was a columnist for *Prairie Messenger Catholic Journal* through its last nineteen years of publication, and taught writing classes for READ Saskatoon, the Western Development Museum, and the University of Saskatchewan's Certificate of Art and Design program. *Walking Upstream* is his first poetry collection. He lives in Saskatoon.

Praise for *Walking Upstream*:

"In this bright and supple collection of lyric reckonings, Lloyd Ratzlaff's humble speakers attend to multitudes. Everything from God to gosling, clover to cuckoo, dogma to dogshit, and Buddha to bee serve as companions on a path of call and response to our world. In the best way, we are re-minded. This book will refresh all who read it."

—Gerald Hill, author of *Crooked at the Far End* and *Hillsdale Book*

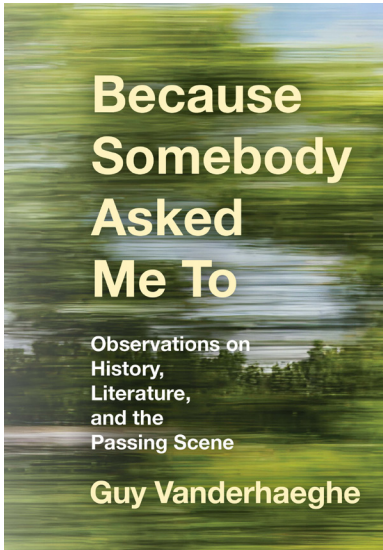
Praise for Past Work:

Bindy's Moon

"A keenly detailed, often lyrical exploration of love, loss, and courage."
—Saskatchewan Writers' Guild John V. Hicks Long Manuscript Awards

"*Bindy's Moon* is exquisitely rendered. Ratzlaff's personal reflections deploy the delicate tuning of an inquisitive mind, the sober bell of experience, and the deft use of language to grapple with life's complexities and transcendent potentials."

—Saskatchewan Book Awards citation



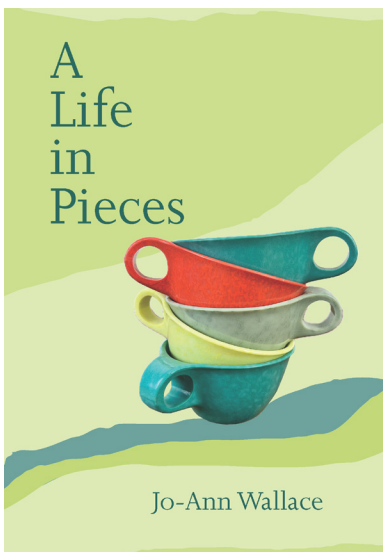
Because Somebody Asked Me To

by Guy Vanderhaeghe

Publication: September 17, 2024
\$25.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 320 pages
ISBN 9781771872584

LITERARY COLLECTIONS / Essays
LITERARY CRITICISM / Canadian
BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Literary Figures
Distributor: UTP Distribution

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



A Life in Pieces

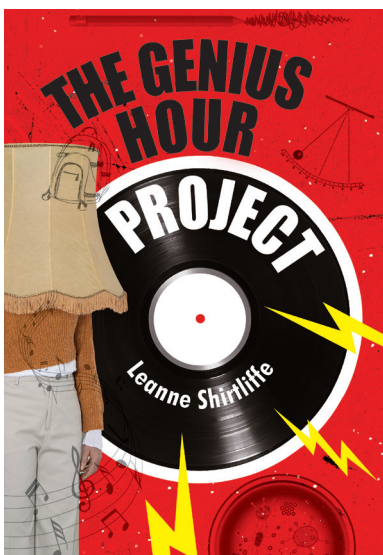
by Jo-Ann Wallace

Publication: August 27, 2024 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 224 pages
ISBN 9781771872560

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Memoirs
BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Women
BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Educators
Distributor: UTP Distribution

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.

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.



The Genius Hour Project

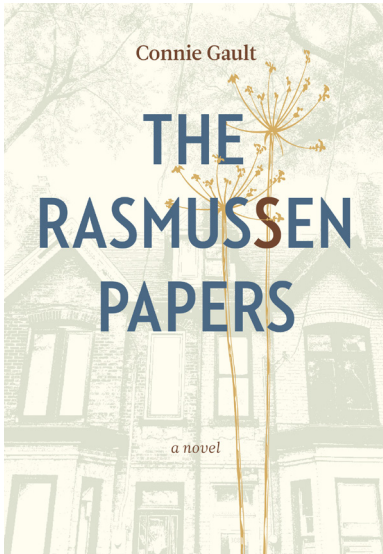
by Leanne Shirliffe

Publication: August 6, 2024
\$16.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 250 pages
ISBN 9781771872577

JUVENILE FICTION / School & Education
JUVENILE FICTION / Family / Parents
JUVENILE FICTION / Social Themes / Friendship
Distributor: UTP Distribution

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.





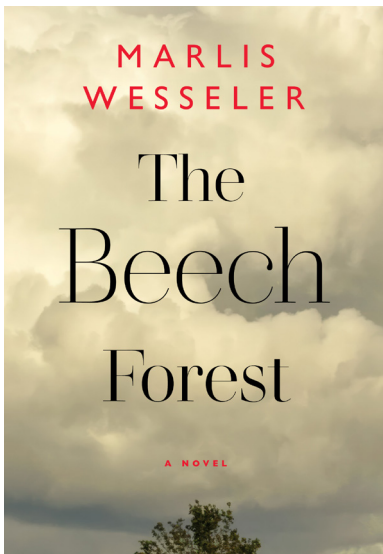
The Rasmussen Papers



by Connie Gault

Publication: May 14, 2024
 \$24.95 paperback | 5.5 x 8.5 | 192 pages
 ISBN 9781771872539
 FICTION / Literary
 FICTION / Psychological
 Distribution: UTP Distribution

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
 FICTION / Small Town & Rural
 Distribution: UTP Distribution

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.



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
 POETRY / Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island
 Distribution: UTP Distribution

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.



Distribution

In Canada and the U.S.:
University of Toronto Press Distribution
5201 Dufferin Street,
Toronto, ON, Canada, M3H 5T8

Customer Service:

Phone: 416-667-7791

Toll-free ordering (North America):

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