

# Canadian poets show their love through the ages

BY STEPHANIE MCKAY, THE STARPHOENIX FEBRUARY 10, 2015

*Dearest reader, When I think of your twinkling eyes as they caress the ink and newsprint upon which this story is printed, I feel a kinship, though we may have never met. I am forever indebted that you invite me into your home and mind, whether it be through a stack of papers between your fingers or the fluorescent glow of a screen.*

*With all my love,*

*The newspaper reporter*

The love letter is not dead, just different, a new book proves.

Where the Nights Are Twice as Long features Canadian poets writing as early as 1883 and as recently as 2014. For editors Jeanette Lynes and David Eso, the research involved countless hours searching through archives and considering the more modern works submitted by writers.

"It was a brave, bold, ambitious project, and off we went," Lynes said, a poet herself.

After reading so many letters - some blissful, some desperate, some angry - she realized the core elements of falling in love and breaking up haven't changed over the years. What has changed is the amount of time it takes to express those feelings.

"Several poets are writing love letters to someone who is across the Atlantic Ocean. In the 1930s or '40s, the letter might take weeks to get there," said Lynes. "Obviously in 1885, these poets are writing with pen and ink. It's kind of neat to track the technology of letter writing through computers, the email era. We even have two Saskatoon contributors who are very young and their exchange is via text messages."

Tyson Atkings and Isa Lausas - one of Lynes' students in the University of Saskatchewan MFA in Writing program - are featured in the chapter for poets in their teens and '20s. They use texts to express feelings beyond the typical LOL or TTFN.

At 67, Saskatoon poet Dave Margoshes' take on love is understandably different. His piece Polar exploration, a poem not a letter, is dedicated to his partner Dee. He said he doesn't write love poems often.

"It's a challenge to write about it and make it fresh," he said. "Love poems, just like love songs, every cliché and then some has been used to death. This particular poem doesn't really sound like a love poem, but I think it is."

Margoshes wrote Polar exploration while attending the writer's colony at St. Peter's Abbey near Muenster, which he attended with Dee, who is also a poet.

Where the Nights Are Twice as Long is organized by the poet's age at the time of writing the letter or poem, rather than by the date in which the letters were written.

Lynes said one letter in particular caused the biggest emotional reaction.

"I just cried when I read Louis Riel's letters to his wife from prison before his execution. They're very heart-wrenching. There's a courage in the words," she said.

The book has works by more than 120 Canadian poets, including Pauline Johnson, Malcolm Lowry, Alden Nowlan, Anne Szumigalski, Leonard Cohen and Di Brandt. Saskatchewan poet Katherine Lawrence is also featured.

Though it's already on shelves, Where the Nights Are Twice as Long will be officially launched March 12 at McNally Robinson. The event begins at 7 p.m. and will feature readings by some of the Saskatchewan contributors.

[smckay@thestarphoenix.com](mailto:smckay@thestarphoenix.com)

### **Katherine Lawrence to Randy Burton**

Regina, Saskatchewan

May 18, 2014

age 59

My love -

How do we celebrate this milestone anniversary? I know of only one way. This is for you:

For thirty years we shared the same bed, gave birth twice, adopted a dog, pooled our money into a single bucket full of holes we stuffed with longer hours and freelance jobs that kept us running through traffic to our offices and back home every day, every month, year after year to dinner with the kids and often our friends: you across the table from me, clatter of tongues, forks, spoons. Where did the years go? How tall the crooked tower of dirty dishes and pots sticky with rice and green vegetables? Did we speak to one another about anything other than what was or wasn't in the refrigerator, the gas tank, the chequing account? Did we talk before we fell asleep, exhausted? Did you know how often I woke to the sound of the house breathing, the small cough and snuffle down the hall, the half moments of silence when all I could hear was my heart? Did you know that I used to stare into the darkness, as I do now, and wonder what path it was that led me here, to you, and all that we built with our beautiful bodies?

I love you,

Katherine

*Letter of Katherine Lawrence to Randy Burton was published in Where the Nights Are Twice as Long: Love Letters of Canadian Poets, edited by David Eso and Jeanette Lynes. Reproduced by permission*

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