Bruce Hunter
For Alberta Views a review of

7 Ways To Sunday *
Stories
By Lee Kvern
Published by ENFIELD & WIZENTY
$19.95
208 PP

Award-winning Okotoks author Lee Kvern’s 3rd book 7 Ways to Sunday, a robust collection of 13 stories, will surely further her reputation as stellar author of short fiction. Her latest book bristles with life and originality. Daughter of an itinerant Mountie, Kvern told me over the phone, her family followed her father’s
postings. Subsequently, she’s at ease in many places, as her stories show – and with many kinds of people.

Kvern’s stories depict local colour and vibrant characters, whether set in an RCMP detachment, an arty New York City, suburban Vancouver, Calgary, Caroline, Alberta, Red Rock Canyon in Waterton National Park, or small town Arkansas. This is suburban gothic at its contemporary best. Her stories are as psychologically nuanced and intricate as those of Alice Munro and Anton Chekhov. Kvern understands evil is an inside job in both its banality and locales. She also shows us even the most unredeemable are worthy of grace. Stylistically, she’s sophisticated, and never sentimental or slick.

Readers will recognize themselves, their families and co-workers in the humour, desperation and disintegration, and sometimes unpredictable, but never easy redemption her
characters face. Picture a neighbour, an arborist in his purple Crocs, who meticulously grooms his hedges, plotting revenge for his wife’s affair. Or the grow-op down the street, where garbage bags of pot are hauled out by sketchy guys eyeing the local punker walking by as a watchful mother fears for her gay son. In another story, a daughter keeps vigil in a hospital room and contemplates rescuing her dying father from his inevitable fate. Kvern reminds us we all live each day not far from the brink. Sometimes we dodge it, sometimes we don’t.

In story after story, Kvern’s compassion shines whether it’s for an HR manager at a grocery chain, a stock boy or a lonely bachelor Mountie. Even for those from the wrong side of everything; whether it’s the tracks, the river or town.

A mom to two adult boys, Kvern trained as a graphic artist and illustrator. Hers is a keen, generous and unflinching eye and sensitive to
humour and irony, as well as juxtaposition of images and colours. A small dog is described as one of those about the weight of a can of Spam. A young diver explores the ghostly ruins of a town beneath a flooded reservoir and retrieves a set of dishes as a gift for an older woman. This is intimate and memorable storytelling. Kvern’s best stories like Munro’s are like small novels with an emotional history, vividly-drawn present and palpable future. Kvern can be hilarious, but she can also take us where we may not wish to go, but are ultimately glad she did.

When I finished this large-hearted book, I sat for a time with it in my lap, heady with gratitude for the talents of one very gifted author. Lee Kvern’s *7 Ways to Sunday* is a work of remarkable compassion and grace.

* A later version of this review appeared in *Alberta Views*, spring, 2014.