

Prince Edward Island-Tasmania Writers' Exchange

REPORT ON 2007 WRITER-IN-RESIDENCY in HOBART, TASMANIA
submitted by
Deirdre Kessler
November 30, 2007

Writers' residence: In Hobart, Tasmania, Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own" translates to an 1830s whalers' cottage of one's own, overlooking the rooftops of historic Salamanca Place, with a view of Mt. Wellington from the writing desk. The Kelly Street Writers' Cottage could not be a more beautiful and inspiring place for a writer to live and work.



The Kelly Street Writers' Cottage, Battery Point, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Public events:

I was invited to participate in the October 5-7, 2007, **Tasmanian Poetry Festival** in Launceston, Tasmania, and there gave three public readings as the eight of us (seven Australian; one Canadian) travelled as a little troupe from venue to venue, reading our poetry, including a reading on a boat as we travelled the Tamar Gorge at sunset. The Tasmanian Poetry Festival, in its 20th year, has a loyal following of poets and poetry lovers from across Tasmania and from the mainland of Australia, and is a superb and satisfying event.

On October 14, 2007, I gave an all-day writing workshop at the **Tasmanian Writers' Centre**, "The Shape of Story," and the post-workshop evaluations, as well as the evidence as the productive day of writing unfolded, showed that the participants were well pleased.

Highlights of the 2007 residency: The project on which I planned to work when I submitted my application way back in November 2006 for the Tasmania-Prince Edward Island Writers' Exchange was a new novel, *Billy McDonough's Hornpipe*. In June of 2007, I was very happy to receive a grant from the **Prince Edward Island Council of the Arts**, a grant which enabled me to give myself a break from teaching and from seeking commercial writing projects in order to focus on the research and writing for the new novel.



Inside the Kelly Street Writers' Cottage, Hobart, Tasmania, looking west over the rooftops of Salamanca Place to Mt. Wellington in the background.

What a thrill it was for me to work every single day of my residency on this new work of fiction. The time in Hobart was tremendously productive. I am well on my way in this novel, which is set in whaling days. The main character in the novel is stranded on an island for a while. Hobart is a sailors' place, historically and currently, and the entire city looks southward toward the Antarctic in many ways: geographically and historically, in story, myth, art, and in research (CSIRO is an international Antarctic research centre located in Hobart). In Hobart, I found myself singing Stan Rogers' "Northwest Passage" as I hiked around the hilly city on the mighty River Derwent, with its face turned toward Antarctica:

*Oh, for just one time,
I would take the Northwest Passage
To find the hand of Franklin
Reaching for the Beaufort Sea
Tracing one warm line
Through a land so cold and savage
And find the northwest passage to the sea.*

The hand of Franklin! John Franklin was an early mayor of Hobart, and a statute of him, erected by his wife Lady Jane Franklin, stands tall on hill in the city's main square. When I looked out to sea from the hill above the writers' cottage, I, too, looked toward Antarctica, and felt the Roaring Forties, the prevailing westerly winds that blow across the Southern Ocean all the way from South America. Tasmania is so far south—south of the African continent—that the wind has nothing to stop it as it blows across the great circumpolar Southern Ocean. I found this frontier spirit exhilarating. And here's the marvelous thing: mixed with the thrill of frontier mentality is the presence of high culture. Hobart is city of culture: orchestras, all genres of music, fine art, theatre, writing, sculpture, architecture.

Dinner with Lord Mayor of Hobart and Director and Executive of Tasmanian Writers' Centre: Toward the end of my month-long residency, I was honoured to have dinner with the Lord Mayor of Hobart, Rob Valentine, along with Joe Bugden, Director, Tasmanian Writers' Centre, and members of the Tas Writers' Centre board. The City of Hobart is a key sponsor of the Island-to-Island Writers' Exchange between Tasmania and Prince Edward Island. Moments after meeting the Lord Mayor, I saw clearly how supportive of the arts he is. He is a dream mayor for artists; he speaks the language and is both curious about and conversant with the creative process. Lord Mayor Valentine is very active in the cultural life of Hobart, Tasmania's capital, a city with a population of about 195,000—a larger population than all of Prince Edward Island.

Post-Residency Readings, Workshops, and Travel:

Long before I left Canada for Australia, I had engagements in other parts of Australia, thanks to Tasmanian Writers' Centre Director Joe Bugden, who, with my permission, forwarded my résumé and contact information to the **Victorian Writers' Centre in Melbourne**, and to the **Northern Territory Writers' Centre in Darwin**. After my Hobart residency, I travelled to the mainland and did readings and writing workshops from the south to north, traversing the Red Centre of Australia via Alice Springs on the Ghan train, an awesome experience in every way. What an adventure to go from the temperate climate of Tasmania to coastal Melbourne, thence to Adelaide and north across the semi-arid heart of the continent, landing many days later in tropical Darwin. I enjoyed meeting members of the literary communities in Melbourne, in Alice Springs, and in Darwin; part of the delight and pleasure of such a trip as this is making good friends halfway round the world.

Consulate General of Canada, Sydney: On November 13, 2007, I met with **Sharon Pinney**, Public Affairs, Culture, and Communications Officer, and **Catriona Smith**, Cultural Affairs Co-ordinator, Consulate General of Canada, Sydney. The meeting was arranged by **Joe Bugden**, Executive Director of the Tasmanian Writers' Centre. The new Consul General of Canada, Sydney, **Tom MacDonald**, had been at the post for just three weeks. Both Sharon Pinney and Catriona Smith were extremely enthusiastic about the Prince Edward Island-Tasmania writers' exchange. They were both familiar with the accomplishments of the Tasmanian Writers' Centre. Though the Consulate cannot provide direct funding for the writers' exchange, it will do all it can to help establish a long-term connection between our two islands.

Next Island-to-Island residency: The deadline for applications from Tasmanian writers who wish to be 2008 Prince Edward Island writer-in-residence is February 15, 2008. The deadline for the next P.E.I. writers interested in going to Hobart, Tasmania, is November 30, 2008. Joe Bugden and his executive at the Tasmanian Writers' Centre will again work with the P.E.I.-Tasmania committee, including the UPEI Dean of Arts Dr. Richard Kurial; UPEI English Department's Dr. Richard Lemm; UPEI Institute of Island Studies Director Dr. Irene Novaczek; and the P.E.I. Writers' Guild; as a member of both UPEI's English Department and the P.E.I. Writers' Guild, I will continue to be part of this committee and support the excellent Island-to-Island Writers' Exchange.

Sponsors of Prince Edward Island-Tasmania Writers' Exchange:

I extend tremendous gratitude to the University of Prince Edward Island Dean of Arts, to the UPEI Institute of Island Studies, to the Canada Council for the Arts, to the Prince Edward Island Writers' Guild, to the Prince Edward Island Council of the Arts, to Joe Bugden and Board Members of the Tasmanian Writers' Centre, and to Lord Mayor Rob H.F. Valentine and the City of Hobart for sponsoring the residency and making my travel and accommodation on the other side of the world possible. Thank you, everyone.

Deirdre Kessler

29 Victory Avenue

Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Canada C1A 5E9

email: kessler@upei.ca



The Kelly Street Writers' Cottage at the top of the Kelly Steps, which lead from historic Salamanca Place on the River Derwent wharf, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.