
THE ELIZABETH BISHOP SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA NEWSLETTER



Editorial

Since our 2017 newsletter, a most wonderful development has occurred in Great Village. Ownership of the Elizabeth Bishop House was transferred to the St. James Church of Great Village Preservation Society in November 2017. This society has opened the house once again to artists: the Elizabeth Bishop House Artists' Retreat is operational once again. Some may wonder why the EBSNS did not take on this task and responsibility, but our society has never owned property and the board felt doing so would transform the society too much for its current capacity. The EBSNS will, however, support the Preservation Society in whatever way possible. The EBSNS is as pleased as many others are in Nova Scotia and the EB world that this change has happened. In this issue, Laurie Gunn (Preservation Society Treasurer and lead organizer on the house transformation) offers a report about how things are unfolding at the house.

Another exciting development is the announcement that Nimbus Publishing in Halifax is going to publish a children's book about Bishop by writer Rita Wilson. This issue offers a short interview with Ms Wilson about this project. We will follow its progress and more will appear on our social media (website, Facebook, blog).

And finally, our AGM is coming up on Saturday, 23 June. As always, it will be held in Great Village, in St. James Church. We will be opening this year's "Echoes of EB" art gallery exhibit, featuring a number of Halifax visual artists (painters and photographers), and the "Elizabeth Bishop's Beginnings" exhibit, with some of the artefacts from the inaugural exhibit, but also some new items. Our guest speaker for the AGM is Halifax poet and writer Brian Bartlett. More information about the AGM is also included in this issue.

Next year the EBSNS turns 25. A quarter of a century is impressive for such a small organization, so we will be planning something special. Stay tuned!

The EBSNS was formed in 1994 to celebrate the life and work of the poet Elizabeth Bishop. The society seeks through its various activities and projects, to promote the appreciation and study of Elizabeth Bishop as a Nova Scotian writer. The EBSNS publishes an annual newsletter and holds its AGM in Great Village in June of each year. For more information about EBSNS and about membership, visit our website <http://www.elizabethbishopns.org>. You can also find more information about Elizabeth Bishop on the EBSNS blog www.elizabethbishopcentenary.blogspot.com. You can also visit our Facebook page "The Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia" <https://www.facebook.com/EBSofNS>



Rita Wilson

I've lived on the bank of the Caribou River for more than four decades now. It's the place where my four kids grew up, where I plant gardens and kayak the river, where I wait for the first great blue heron to land each spring. It's where I've learned about brackish rivers, raccoons in chicken houses, and stacking firewood so it doesn't fall over.

My life has always been filled with books, as well as the intention to really write -- since my English major college days. That writing has taken many forms. Always a journal. In the years of teaching young kids, there were report cards, grant applications, papers for classes. And always, the intention to really write.

Since retiring, I've written: Articles for *Saltscapes*, poems published in *The Antigonish Review*, *Fathom*, *The Cumberland Review*, and *Arc*, been a recipient of the Atlantic Poetry Prize.

Being part of a writing group has given me the constancy of feedback and deadlines; taking part in Sue Goyette's Dal poetry class and the WFNS mentorship with Anne Simpson opened up conversations and questions that allowed me to shake my words and hear my own voice more clearly. Being part of the *Writing on Fire* committee, a program to support North Shore teens who love to write, reminds me of the importance of each person's voice.

Since retiring, I discovered Bishop. Having taught young children, witnessed their openness, their hunger for powerful words and beauty, their questions and uncertainties, made me want to share Bishop with them. Sandra Barry's support made that seem imminently possible.

I have a backlog of ideas for other children's books, but right now I'm working on a collection of poems about this place, where I arrived as an inadvertent back to the lander, and have dug and grown. I'm making a map drawn from geography and memory, marking the map with the legends that emerge, layer after layer, realizing in that process that this is a place where the Mi'kmaq first lived. Learning just how much there is to learn; there is no end.

Interview with Rita Wilson

When and how did you first learn about Elizabeth Bishop?

Unbelievably, I came to Elizabeth Bishop through Sable Island. Zoe Lucas was doing an “afternoon” at the Bishop house in Great Village, and I was captivated by the both the idea of the island and Zoe’s experiences there. I knew nothing of the Bishop house, Elizabeth Bishop, or Great Village. That was the beginning.

Next, I brought my daughter for an “afternoon” that Sandra Barry offered, in which she talked about Bishop and also read some of her own poetry. We were both captivated, surprised, eager to know more. I can remember my daughter asking, as we left, “How could I not know about Elizabeth Bishop?” She had gone to elementary and high school in Nova Scotia, she was a reader, yet she knew nothing. I asked myself the same question, in all my reading over all the years, how had I missed Bishop?

What made you want to write a book about her for young readers?

When I stepped into Bishop’s house, followed Sandra through the rooms, and heard the stories, I immediately thought that this could be the perfect framework for a children’s book about Bishop. I was a teacher of young children, and knew how fascinated they were with words, people, and stories. I knew the power of books, and I thought that perhaps, if children were introduced to Bishop, they might then introduce their parents and the other adults in their lives. It seemed the perfect avenue.

What is the nature, focus and approach of the book? What is the age range?

The book has a narrative line that takes the reader through the house, then out into the village. Each page is located in a different room; each page has a piece of Bishop’s writing (from her poetry or prose) as well, pertaining to that specific place. The goal is for the reader to come to know Bishop as a child living in Great Village, her fears, her delights, and her love of words.

The publisher suggests marketing the book for 3rd-5th graders. I think there is the potential to dive into the book on different levels, and this will extend the age range to younger readers.

How do you think Bishop’s time in Great Village affected her writing?

So much of Bishop’s writing comes explicitly from her time in Great Village, that it seems impossible to overestimate the impact of that time. Her descriptions are so vivid and precise, it’s as if she carried that time intact with her, detail by detail, until she was ready to write about it. Those specific stories and poems are obvious evidence of Great Village influence, but the threads of loss and home are woven throughout her work. Those both seem directly linked to her time in, and removal from, Great Village.

What is your favourite Bishop poem or story?

Well, that’s pretty impossible to answer. “One Art” always touches me, but there are so many other poems that do too. I’ve read and re-read the prose that is set in Great Village; every time another image appears, some unnoticed detail or sensation that makes me ever more aware of Bishop’s mastery.



**For The Love of a House
by Laurie Gunn**

It was a wonderful day in October, 2017 when I was able to convince the St. James Church of Gt. Village Preservation Society to take on ownership of the Elizabeth Bishop House, from a private donor. I made a promise to them that I would do all the work or find people to help me with the tasks that needed to be done.

I have loved the Elizabeth Bishop House since 2009 when I first joined the Elizabeth Bishop Society. My friend Joy Laking was asked first and she said that she would join, if they asked her friend Laurie to join as well. The first piece of prose of Elizabeth Bishop that I read was "In the Village" and I was hooked. I fell in love with Great Village all over again.

We would often have EB meetings at the house and I loved the quaintness and the fact that it was so very old. I also loved the steep stairs, the very noisy furnace, the low ceilings, the old wallpaper, the pantry with the hundred drawers, Uncle George hanging out in the parlour, the secret room off the writing room with the old newspapers on the wall for insulation and the old barn which is attached to the house. I could go on but I think you get the idea.

I am not sure why a few years ago I voted against owning the house, when an EB fan from Ontario proposed raising money to buy it and give it to EBSNS. The only thing I remember after the vote was a deep sadness that I would no longer have access to this wonderful home.

With the help of my friend Joy who got me hooked in the first place and Sandra Barry who is the expert on all things relating to Elizabeth Bishop and Nova Scotia, we were able to work out the conditions of an Artist Retreat, that would be available for a donation from May - October, as well as a two week Artist Residency in September. The response for both was very positive.

Doing an assessment of the building and discovering what repairs needed to be done and finding the most amazing, talented people to do them, including my dear husband Dan, was actually a pleasant task. We now have a new oil tank, new electrical wiring and the exterior is receiving a new coat of paint this Spring. Thanks to Sandra and all the wonderful EB people who donated money for the repairs. I also have an even better understanding of the house through Sandra's memoir "Gestalt of Old Wood". It is like a love story of an amazing old, much loved home.

**ELIZABETH BISHOP SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA
2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Saturday, 23 June, 2018

1:30 PM

St. James Church, Great Village, Nova Scotia

Opening of “Echoes of Elizabeth Bishop” Gallery

(with works by seven Halifax area painters, photographers),

and the “Elizabeth Bishop’s Beginnings” exhibit.

Guest speaker Brian Bartlett will be reading from his recent work.

Reception to follow at the Great Village Legion.



Brian Bartlett has published seven collections and six chapbooks of poetry, including *Wanting the Day: Selected Poems* (recipient of the Atlantic Poetry Prize) and *The Watchmaker’s Table* (recipient of the Acorn Plantos Award for People’s Poetry). He has also edited volumes of selected poetry by Don Domanski, James Reaney, Robert Gibbs and Dorothy Roberts, a gathering of prose about Don McKay, an anthology of poems about childhood (*The Child Alone*), and the *Collected Poems of Alden Nowlan*. Brian’s prose books include *All Manner of Tackle: Living with Poetry* (Palimpsest, 2017), a compilation of essays, journals, memoirs, tributes, columns and other prose pieces; and two volumes of nature writing, *Ringing Here & There: A Nature Calendar* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2014) and *Branches Over Ripples: A Waterside Journal* (Gaspereau Press, 2017). The latter brings together many journal entries drafted outdoors by various bodies of water (lakes, ponds, rivers, brooks, marshes, waterfalls, bays), including locations around Great Village, such as Economy Falls, Thomas Cove, Spencer’s Point and Great Village River. After twenty-eight years of teaching creative writing and many fields of literature at Saint Mary’s University, Brian retires at the end of this June.



Our Annual Meeting 2017

