

arts & entertainment

...on the Semiahmoo Peninsula

New writers and best-selling literary icons alike find inspiration at the Surrey International Writers Conference

Authors share love of story-telling

Kevin Diakiw
Black Press

On March 6, 1988, she wanted to know what it took to write a novel and whether she really wanted to do that "for real."

Diana Gabaldon began bashing away at *Outlander*, a historical fiction about a Second World War combat nurse thrown back in time 200 years.

Split between two loves in two different times, her protagonist, Claire Randall, finds herself in an impossible position – but one that has proven compelling for many readers. It was Gabaldon's first book, but certainly not her last.

But her writing also served as an inspiration to many budding writers, including those attending the Surrey International Writers Conference (SIWC).

A regular fixture at the event, Gabaldon will be just one of a host of presenters coming to the 2014 edition, at the Sheraton Vancouver, Guildford, from Oct. 24 to 26.

Gabaldon comes to the conference fresh from publication of her eighth epic novel in the *Outlander* series, *Written in My Own Heart's Blood*, which has already reached the number-one spot on the New York Times' best seller list for hardcover fiction. Even after 26 years of writing, Gabaldon is hard-pressed to describe her genre.

She calls it "big, fat, historical fiction, à la James Clavell and James Michener."

It's the story that transfixed the readers of Gabaldon's books.

Surrey author Laura Bradbury read Gabaldon's *Outlander* in 2003 and was transformed by it.

She has a degree in English literature and has read all of the greats, but she was completely enamoured with the plot offered in *Outlander*.

She joined the Compuserve literary forum where Gabaldon often posts, and made a point of attending SIWC the following



Diana Gabaldon speaks at last year's Surrey International Writers Conference at the Sheraton Vancouver, Guildford. This year's conference will be held Oct. 24-26 at the Sheraton Vancouver Guildford.

year.

"The Surrey writers' conference is all about that, it's all about story telling," Bradbury said in an

interview with *Black Press*.

Bradbury always loved to write but hadn't written a book for "fear of failure."

The conference got her writing, she says, but she couldn't finish the books she started.

In 2012, she was diagnosed

"Here I stand on the brink of war again, a citizen of no place, no time, no country but my own... a land lapped by no sea, but blood, bordered by the only outlines of a face long-loved."

- excerpt from *My Own Heart's Blood* by Diana Gabaldon

with a rare liver disease.

"My life changed from one minute to the next," Bradbury says. "I went from a healthy, globetrotting, writing mother of three, to looking my mortality very closely in the face."

With new resolve, she decided to finish the three books she started.

She has already published the first book, a memoir, called *My Grape Escape* in November of last year.

She self-published it using Kindle with the help of local social media guru Sean Cranberry.

"The sales have been extraordinary. I'm a Canadian best seller already," Bradbury said.

My Grape Escape is at the number-one spot in Amazon France and holds the top 100 spot for Amazon memoirs.

A sequel called *My Grape Village* is coming out before this year's SIWC.

Bradbury will be sharing her success story as a keynote speaker at the event that kindled her success.

She will be talking about how life is short and writers who are thinking about it should get busy.

"Creativity, and writing specifically, has been a lifeline for me," she said.

"The future is uncertain, and you have to seize what you are. You are a writer. You have to honour yourself, to write and to finish."

The SIWC has also grown from modest beginnings.

Starting in 1993, with 100 attendees at Johnson Heights Secondary School, it has since become a packed annual event that attracts authors and speakers from around the globe.


More information can be found at www.siwc.ca

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