

AL PURDY A-FRAME ASSOCIATION—2017 REPORT

It was another year of adventure and challenges at the Al and Eurithe Purdy A-frame. As you will see from the reports from the writers-in-residence, the wonky little place continues to inspire. In 2017, the wonky little place also presented some surprises.

Property/Funding

To prepare the house for opening in spring 2017, the caretaker and one of our volunteers did a sight inspection. They heard that most terrifying of noises to a property owner—a drip. Sure enough, we had a leak in the flat roof caused by damage from wind-thrown tree limbs. The roof needed to be completely replaced. Fortunately the \$20,000-plus cost was covered by insurance except for a \$1000 deductible and \$2000 in taxes.

That put a substantial hole in our budget. The \$3000 budgeted for inoculation of the ash trees had been invested in the roof, and without inoculation the trees were at risk—some trees on the other side of Roblin Lake are infected and have died. A call-out to our database resulted in much-appreciated donations. The trees were innoculated.

Under the new guidelines at the Canada Council the host organization no longer makes the application for funding for residencies—the writer applies. Two writers-in-residence applied for CC funding but neither was successful. So once again the budget needed to be revised and the Al Purdy A-frame Association had to cover the shortfall.

We scaled back on planned upgrades, accepted an offer from Thee Hellbox Press to produce a special, limited-edition chapbook as a fundraiser and finished the year with a modest surplus.

Other news

There was a Purdy Drinks event in March at the historic Monarch Tavern in Toronto featuring Doug Paisley (musician), Phoebe Wang (poet) and Max Layton (poet and musician). Max was interviewed about his father (Irving Layton) and personal memories of Al and Leonard Cohen. Great music from Doug, and Phoebe is an exciting new talent.

In the Globe & Mail, Doug Paisley spoke of being inspired by time at the A-frame. In dozens of interviews Bruce Cockburn said his new album was the result of being asked to write a song for Al Purdy was Here. What great visibility and support for the A-frame.

For 2018 we plan to launch the Literary Tour, and revamp and expand content on the website. Oh, and celebrate the 100th anniversary of Al Purdy's birth.

We hope that you enjoy reading the following reports from the writers-in-residence. Their stories, and the new stories being written at the A-frame, are the heart of the organization.

WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE REPORTS

Andrea Bennett, May 18 to June 15, 2017

As a freelance writer, editor and fact-checker, my schedule is generally very busy and doesn't leave as much time as I'd like for poetry. Attending the A-Frame residency allowed me to focus almost completely on poetry; I was able to dedicate my thoughts and efforts to the generation of new work, and the evaluation of older work.

By the end of the residency, I had nineteen new poems and, perhaps more importantly, I had a sense of the shape of my new manuscript.

James Arthur, June 16 to August 11, 2017

“While at the A-frame—with wife, fiction writer Shannon Robinson, and our son Henry—I wrote 12 new poems. I don’t believe that I’ve ever had a richer, more rewarding period of writing...Al’s spirit seems to linger here and there around the A-frame, so like other residents, I sometimes found myself talking to Purdy, both on the page and actually, out loud...I did some of the best writing of my career to date, and came away feeling a much stronger connection to Purdy’s own life and work.

“Ultimately I hope and expect that all my A-frame poems will appear in book form, some in my second book, *Entanglement*, now under consideration at Copper Canyon Press, and some in my third manuscript, which I’ve tentatively titled *Shadowbox*. Shannon wrote a new piece of short fiction, “There Be Dragons,” which she plans to include her first story collection. We hosted dozens of pilgrims.”

Oana Avasilichioaei, August 12 to September 8, 2017

“The month spent at the A-Frame was extremely productive. I went there to work on parts of my next book *Eight-Track* which investigates the various meanings of the word “track,” such as musical and cinematic tracks, speech tracking, animal tracking, human tracking and systems of surveillance.

“I worked on a companion piece to one of the major long poems in the book, “Tracking Animal,” inspired by Jacques Derrida’s influential essay *L’animal que donc je suis* (which is typically translated in English as *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*). I completed two other long poems, “Q & A” and “If,” which I had begun prior to arriving at the A-Frame. I drafted one other new poem titled “The Surveyor.” In my last week, I also invited another writer to stay with me and work alongside me, namely the New York poet and translator Mina Pam Dick.”

Autumn Richardson, September 23 to November 19, 2017

My primary reason for applying to the A-Frame for a residency was to have the necessary time and solitude to complete my first full-length poetry collection. When I arrived at the A-Frame one of the first things I did was create a document entitled '18 Poems' (in homage to Tomas Tranströmer's 17 Poems, though I soon afterwards realized that Dylan Thomas's first collection was entitled 18 Poems – fantastic company both) and that was my goal for the next two months – to complete 18 poems during my time in residency, both from editing the draft of poems I had brought with me (consisting primarily of work begun during a 6-month mentorship with Don Domanski in the Banff Wired Writing Studio in 2014/15) and also through completing new work at the A-Frame. I'm pleased to share that I did complete my collection of 18 poems – plus many more, mainly due to the addition of several new poems written at the A-Frame.

“I also have a wealth of new notes and poem fragments to further edit, prompted by the immersion in the landscape and natural life surrounding the A-Frame, and also, most importantly, the solitude I was able to immerse myself in for those two months. I didn't expect to feel such a connection to the landscape, as I myself am originally from northern Ontario, and then moved to the Kootenay mountains in British Columbia in my early twenties – so the landscapes I tend to identify with are quite wild and rugged. But the colours, scents, textures, and the plethora of wildlife in Prince Edward County truly astonished me.

“The Al Purdy Library was integral to my time – I ordered many books, mostly poetry, and always had both support and enthusiasm from the library staff, especially Gisa who was incredibly helpful and welcoming. Every book I requested was found for me. I also very much appreciated the many books in Al's own collection at the house. The poetry selection, especially the anthologies, were wonderful to have to hand, and his interest in polar exploration/landscapes is akin to my own, so I enjoyed several of the accounts that he had collected.

“I also had several wonderful and inspiring meetings with other poets and writers during my stay including John Steffler, Susan Gillis, Steven Heighton and Phil Hall. I was a guest reader with Phil Hall and Stan Dragland at the Book Shop in Tamworth, Ontario. I accompanied Eurithe Purdy to Thee Hellbox Press for the final pressing and official launch of Al Purdy's collection, with poems selected by Eurithe.”