

2020 AL PURDY A-FRAME ANNUAL REPORT TO DONORS

Things we learned in 2020

While writers work in solitude, the first wave of the pandemic showed us how much more isolated writers and their peers in the literary community could become. No big company providing on-going salary and benefits. No guarantee of government assistance that depended upon prior paid employment. No supportive network of fellow union members or employees. Writers-in-residence programs are more important than ever, to give writers the opportunity for supported and funded writing time. Books and the sustained long-form thinking that they provide are essential in a slam, bam twitter world.

We also learned how to properly wash our hands.

Residencies in the time of pandemic

To open or not to open was the question in the spring. The board decided to defer all spring residencies to a later date. With the clear need for community safety and courtesy, we did open the A-frame in early August with extra time and space for cleaning. Three writers from Ontario did partial residencies and will complete their allotted weeks at a future date. The schedule for 2021 will be fluid until things in Ontario settle down. It will take 12 to 18 months to sort out the backlog.

As you will see from the writers-in-residence reports that follow, the A-frame during a pandemic has a special kind of magic and inspiration.

The budget

Faced with a pandemic-induced budget shortfall, we recently completed a successful COVID-related email fundraising campaign that resulted in more than \$25,000 in donations. This “COVID campaign” was undertaken to replace monies usually raised at in-person fundraising events such as our annual Open House and readings in Toronto. Thank you to everyone who donated. It is possible to set up an automatic monthly donation through CanadaHelps. If you are doing legacy planning you might consider a donation in your will—such a donation may help with taxes.

Ben Ladouceur Workshops

Ben was an A-frame writer-in-residence in 2016 and has also served on our Selection Committee. His response to the fundraising campaign was to offer on-line workshops as a volunteer, to help raise funds to keep the A-frame door open. Ben was the Artistic Director for the Tree Reading series from 2018 to 2020 and has extensive experience facilitating workshops. Response was really positive as the remarks from participants demonstrate:

- “Thanks for the amazing workshop—just so soul-soothing.”

- “The atmosphere was supportive, the prompts useful, and the example poems presented were both various and excellent. It was fun.”
- “The workshops were terrific, and I just wish Ben were doing more of them.”

Okay. We will do more, with Ben and others. Stay tuned for more details.

PROPERTY REPORT 2020

On the Flood Plain

The Al Purdy A-frame is sinking into the mud! As with many aspects of the building, the Purdys economized on the foundations, using cinder blocks that would not pass code today. The subsidence of the foundation on the lakeside has caused the floor beneath the French doors to sag. Added to the problem is the fact that the level of Roblin Lake has been rising and drainage patterns have changed, resulting in water pooling under the floor. If the building is to survive the ages, a proper frost-proof foundation is a must and while that is being put in the structure should be raised so it is well clear of the rising water table (several years ago this work was completed on the writing shed so it is safe and dry). This will be a major project costing \$100,000 or more. Because of the extensive nature of this work we cannot begin until funding is in place.

A major issue that we had intended to deal with in 2020 but had to shelve for lack of funds is the cleanup of the old garage foundation (the garage burned down many years ago) near Gibson Road, which caved in during the winter of 2019 and needs site remediation. We got quotes in the \$5,000.00 range but were unable to proceed. In the mean time Ken Hennessy, our current handyman and neighbour, has taped off the site so people don't enter it.

On the plus side, 2020 was the year for landscaping. Thanks to Marlene Thompson having time on her hands and only billing for part of her time, the outside property is looking better than it has in years. Encroaching brush has been cut back, trees have been trimmed, plantings have been tended, and an astonishing amount of accumulated construction waste has been removed.

The major building maintenance project was replacing the rotted siding on the west side of the house, which was done with great competence by Ken. He also re-paneled the wall of the entrance hallway and repaired and refinished wooden window frames on the north side. He also did some squirrel-proofing and replaced the sump pump.

Eurithe Purdy purchased and installed in the entrance hallway a framed scroll acknowledging donors.

One of the residents had an accident that broke the glass-top kitchen range. Ken replaced it with a similar model purchased second hand.

Shingles blew off the A-frame roof in a windstorm and were replaced at almost no cost by the multi-talented Marlene.

Longer-term projects include completion of the Purdy memorabilia display in the writing room annex and construction of a tool shed to store yard maintenance equipment. There is also a lot of minor maintenance needed such as replacement of eaves troughs, soffits and fascia, which are in poor condition. Long term the greatest concern is the deteriorating foundation, as noted above. This is not an urgent matter but needs to be a subject of long-term fundraising if permanent preservation of the building is the goal.

Now that the residency program is running smoothly it is time to build an A-frame Endowment Fund so the tasks above can be completed.

We will be launching the Help to BUILD THE FOUNDATION fundraising campaign in 2021 and a Monthly Giving plan.

WRITERS-IN-RESIDENCE FINAL REPORTS

Madhur Anand, August 1 to August 15, 2020

The Al Purdy A-frame sits on the edge of a glacial lake, Roblin Lake, which dates to the pre-Pleistocene. Every morning and evening dozens of songbirds make their presence known solely through their songs. Before my family, who spent the first weekend with me, leaves, I ask them to write a poem entitled *What Do Birds Think?* I feel they owe a debt to poetry, to their two-night stay in Al's house with me. None of my family members are in the habit of writing or even reading poems, even though they live with a poet. But I assure them that poetry is a pay-what-you-can endeavour. After they leave, I enter into the deep solitude of the A-frame, including several forays into Al's bookshelves and the limestone shelves of the lake. I submerge myself into what I can only call apandemic time. Poetry can communicate our otherwise hidden selves to one another in such a time, where everything must be questioned anew. Here is one offering from that exercise:

What Do the Birds Think?

There are many questions that can be asked.
A small boy may ask for a toy.
A foolish man may ask for valuables he cannot afford.
You may call me a foolish man.
I sleep in the outdoors even though I have a house.
I listen to the sounds of the birds in the morning.
They are such curious creatures.
I step into the broad daylight.
The birds are now shrieking.
I came up to a mother robin in her nest.
She doesn't move.

I don't move, either.
I ask the only thing that comes to my mind.
"What do you think?"
Not as in "what are you thinking about?"
But "what do you think of me?"
There was a moment of silence.
I had a bond with this particular robin.

Kiran Anand-Bauch (age 11, unedited first draft) August 1, 2020

Sophie Edwards, August 28 to September 19

The three weeks at the Residency was the first time in more than twenty-five years that I'd had a stretch of time by myself. Finding time before and since, as a single mom, and as a carer for my ageing mother, among other things, is difficult and makes it exceedingly challenging to focus with any regularity.

The upside of the pandemic and the limitations on visits at the Residency, and my care with social visits and touring in the broader community, meant that I had a very long stretch of quiet time to myself, with few distractions.

I'm deeply grateful to have had the time to both dig into my project and to be in my own thoughts. To be surrounded by all things 'writerly' was certainly an important part of the process. Not insignificantly, to be supported, and to know that the committee found my work of value was an immense boost. This boost was personal / emotional, but also came in the form of kudos and positive responses from my local community in Kagawong ON. An unexpected outcome was that as my local circles were unfamiliar with the Purdy Residency prior to my attendance, being recognized by the Residency gave local writers (and artists) the sense that there are possibilities and opportunities out there for us. Many local folks were excited about me being invited to be an Artist-in-Residence at this highly regarded Residency. I am also certain that the Residency also built my profile on my most recent (and successful) OAC application.

It is difficult to put into words what happens at the Residency... I wrote words, but much of it is beyond words, or what occurs to get us to and through the words. Having space and time for my brain and hands to work in their own way, not structured by the demands of family and work and regular life was a gift that I'll never forget. I wish I could bottle that energy and take a draft each morning.

Felicty Williams, September 27 to October 18

In the strange hiatus year of 2020, being at the A-frame as the summer gradually declined into fall was an opportunity to pause even more deeply, during an already halted state of affairs. I feel very lucky to have been able to take up residence in that space that is so conducive to sinking down into a productive creative process.

Each morning I spent a few hours reading by the window in the living room. I liked to imagine Al and Eurithe (and so many other writers) assuming that same vantage point, a shared gaze. During the day that big picture window lets you feel almost as if you were outside; the mind is drawn outward through the eye to the life happening on the shore of the lake. At night, it reverses; alone inside in the lamplight, I imagined an eye or eyes outside the house looking in - the interior of the house becomes a stage through that same big window; everything outside is black. My feeling about this was reflected in a line from Purdy's "House Guest", where he describes a night and morning after he and Milton Acorn spent together in the A-frame: *and in the early morning looking outside to see the pink shapes of wind printed on snow and a red sun tumbling upward almost touching the house and fretwork tracks of rabbits outside where the window light had lain last night an audience watching in wonderment the odd human argument that uses words instead of teeth and got bored and went away*

I found that I spent more time starting new songs than orchestrating the songs I had previously composed. I think this is because I spent more time reading poems than I had planned to. Once I was there, it felt important to dig deeper into Purdy's writing while I was in that house ~ especially given that Covid had altered the timeline for the residency and it would be several months at least before I'd be rehearsing with the ensemble. How special to read Purdy's words about the roof while under that same roof, about the shoreline while looking out at it, about a heron just before glimpsing (possibly) one of its descendants. . . Every day I went for a run either toward or away from Ameliasburg. Following that I swam in the lake. . .the temperature went from refreshingly freezing at the end of September to barely manageable toward the end of October. The time I spent reading and reflecting has opened up the way I look at / experience these poems. The residency has created momentum and as I move forward with the project I look forward to orchestrating the new and older songs over the winter, in advance of rehearsing and performing with my ensemble at the A-frame at a later date.