

AL AND EURITHE PURDY A-FRAME RESIDENCY REPORT 2018

As the reports from writers indicate, the house itself is a large part of the residency experience. It also requires regular maintenance and ongoing upgrade work. For 2018 there were no expected surprises. Almost.

For years we've been in constant battle with Prince Edward County rodents. Squirrels had inhabited Al's writing shed, and only after completing restoration and totally replacing the roof did they relocate. Likewise, mice in the kitchen, raccoons in the garbage, and so on. Plans were developed, put in place, and except for the occasional visiting mouse, we thought we were winning.

Then an early August email from a writer-in-residence; "Beavers have been chewing a tree near the lake." Seriously, beavers? How Canadian. It turns out that writers are pretty handy with wire and to date the tree still stands. Otherwise an uneventful year on the property, though we didn't have sufficient funds for much upgrade work.

The **Literary tour** of Prince Edward County and the larger community launched fall 2018 with an 8-page brochure for the new A-frame Open House. In 2019 we will print copies to be distributed throughout the area at libraries, wineries and tourist destinations in an effort to increase **community involvement**. The brochure is also available on the website.

The pilgrims come, and now they have an additional attraction. Eurithe Purdy recently set up a **Purdy display** in the antechamber of the writing shed that will provide visitors with information about Purdy, his literary career, with display photos, etc.

Music from the documentary *Al Purdy Was Here* became a boxed CD/DVD set *The Al Purdy Songbook* and was launched fall 2018. As well as generating great press and visibility for the A-frame, if the project produces profit, it will go to APAFA.

2018 was the 100th anniversary of Purdy's birth. Harbour published a tribute anthology, *Beyond Forgetting* and held events coast-to-coast. The anthology raised \$5400 for the A-frame—a good thing because in 2018, again, we received no Canada Council funding.

Purdy Drinks, April, Monarch Tavern

"It was a wonderfully rich and Purdyesque night at the Monarch last night. Laura Clarke divulged intimate texts between herself and elliptical trainers in the gym; Karen Boothman, direct from Cobourg tuned her guitar well and sang beautifully. Jeff Latosik read limber poetry including one or two crowd-pleasers by Al 'The Inimitable'. Ken Babstock kept things electric and word-drunk on stage, standing in for Karen Solie. Damian Rogers spoke/read movingly of her memoir about her mother in decline; Alex Kukashevky performed unearthly songs about how 'if you live a liquid life/a girlfriend helps solidify you'. Expertly hosted by Alexandra of the Al Purdy A Frame Association. Great turnout!"—Marni Jackson

There was also a successful April event in Vancouver.

The George Galt Fund for Canadian Literary Writers

“The A-Frame now has two extraordinary histories: first as the homemade house of the much-loved literary couple Al and Eurithe Purdy, and second as a restored cultural treasure that welcomes several writers-in-residence every year.

“Thanks to what must be thousands of volunteer hours, the effort, led by Jean Baird, to save and restore the A-Frame has been an unqualified success.

“So, it’s tempting now to think of the Purdy house as permanent and indestructible. Let’s hope. But like any heritage building, the A-Frame needs to be maintained. When those of us who have been enthusiastic supporters of the project are gone, will the A-Frame survive?

“With this question in mind, I approached the Community Foundation for Kingston and Area and asked if I could leave a bequest to benefit the A-Frame in perpetuity. (After some research, I chose the Kingston Foundation, the largest community foundation in the area, and one with an excellent investing record.) Yes, it’s possible to create within the Foundation that kind of fund dedicated to a specific purpose, I was told. Ideally such a fund would be created while the donor is still alive.

“So this is what I’ve done, making the minimum \$10,000 donation in 2018, which will be supplemented by a larger amount when I die. The Foundation is contractually obliged to send all income from my little fund to the Al Purdy A-Frame Association, as long as APAFA exists as a registered charity. (In the unlikely event that APAFA folds, the fund will still be dedicated to helping Canadian literary writers, hence its name.) The income from this fund may not be enough to pay all the A-Frame’s future bills, but it will help. “Anyone is welcome to donate to my fund. Donors should specify their gift is for the George Galt Fund for Canadian Literary Writers, and cheques should be made out to the Kingston Foundation, which issues tax receipts.”—George Galt

Big thanks to George.

In 2019 we hope to launch the *Al Purdy A-frame Alumni Anthology*, edited by Dr. Brian Way, to record, celebrate and sustain the new legacy of the house, and create an archival website that chronicles all writers-in-residence who have lived in the A-frame—bios, written work and links to their websites, blogs, etc. APAFA believes that writers should be paid for their work. It is hard to believe, but as of October 2018 a total of 25 writers-in-residence have lived and worked at the A-frame. We are looking for a sponsorship of \$5000 for this project.

As always, the final word goes to our writers-in-residence. Please note the continued legacy of visitors and hospitality.

REPORTS FROM 2018 WRITERS IN RESIDENCE.

Tim Falconer

I was working on a book about how Canada fell in love with hockey focusing on the 1905 Stanley Cup series between Dawson City and Ottawa. In my three weeks at the A-Frame, I wrote more than 6,000 words. That may not sound like a lot, but it's actually double my pace at home. Since I am writing historical non-fiction, it's easy to spend a couple of hours just searching for one fact. But more than just the number of words I wrote, my stay at the A-Frame gave me time to spend more time reading, to rework my structure (which always seems to be in flux with this book) and renew my passion for the project.

I invited two authors—Wellington resident Geoff Heinrichs, who interviewed Al Purdy for his book about making wine in the County called *A Fool and Forty Acres*, and *Run Over* author Douglas Bell, who lives in Belleville—for dinner one night. Another writer who dropped by was Michael Barclay. I'd gone to his reading in Wellington to promote *Long Time Running*, his new biography about Gord Downie and the Tragically Hip. At the event, he mentioned that Purdy was one of Downie's favourite poets. So I invited Barclay and his wife Helen, to drop by the A-Frame. They loved it (as all visitors do).

Weird connections kept happening. A friend in Wellington texted to say that Stew Jones wanted to visit. Stew is an artist and he'd promised the A-Frame Association a few years ago that he would donate a painting of the A-Frame that the Association could auction off. But he'd never seen the place. So he came and took several photos to work with. (Bonus: Stew is a partner in the Midtown Brewery and he brought a growler of beer with him and we sat on the deck and had a long chat.)

Maria Sabaye Moghaddam

I worked on a short story collection about my reflections on daily life based on my experience of growing up in Iran. This was a very productive period, where I managed to work on drafts of three stories, develop ideas for two, and revise eight existing stories.

There were many opportunities to meet and connect with other artists and writers such as Helen Humphrey and Frances Itani, who presented talks and readings at local libraries in Wellington and Picton. I also had a chance to host a young writer and researcher, Andrew French, who came from B.C. for a visit. Andrew had a great enthusiasm for Al Purdy's poetry and was deeply moved and inspired by visiting his house. During the tour of the house and the grounds, we discussed poetry and writing, mine and his, but also the state of learning literature at the university and future possibilities for the younger generation.

I am very pleased with the process and the outcome of this residency and ready to continue my writing to complete the collection. I am very grateful to the Al Purdy A-Frame Association for this wonderful opportunity. I have had other residencies in the past, but never have I received so much respectful attention and support as in this one. I have already written about it in my blog and definitely recommend it to many others.

Jeff Weingarten—academic/research residency

Dr. Jeff Weingarten's residency included a well-received talk at the Wellington Public Library about Al Purdy's poetry and life, and his generation's contributions to the writing community. Jeff made a point of exploring Prince Edward County as part of his research for his upcoming book, *Sharing the Past* (UTP, 2019), which is a detailed history of Canadian poetry's development as a historiographic genre since 1960.

One day Steven Heighton stopped by with Eurithe Purdy, and we shared a morning reminiscing about Al and the building of the A-Frame. Eurithe also dug up an old bottle of Purdy's wild grape wine, which Steven and I sampled. It was surreal to sip something Al crafted himself, and my introduction to Steven led us to concoct an essay he plans to write on his personal library, which will be included in a manuscript about authors' libraries that I'm co-editing with Dr. Jason Camlot (Concordia University). The brunch with Eurithe and Steven was one of the highlights of the trip.

The time spent in the A-Frame was time spent with Al's ghost. I often found myself wondering what I would tell my younger self, the 19 year old who first read "Wilderness Gothic" in undergrad, about the experience. I expect it would have floored the younger me to know that, in 14 years, I'd be setting up shop and finishing the final edits on my first book at Al's desk, next to his typewriter and coffee stains.

Laura Clarke

I had an extremely productive time during my stay at the A-Frame. I was able to make considerable headway on my new collection of poetry (currently titled *Materials for a Memoir on Animal Locomotion*), producing a lot of new poems and finally solidifying the structure and thematic relationships of the book. I was also able to make considerable advances on my novel (currently untitled) – much more than I anticipated.

I had one group of Purdy pilgrims drop by for a visit—a group of four visual artists from Guelph. I also had a writer named Chris who knew Al and Eurithe and was dropping by the cabin for the first time in many years. He told me some stories about Al, and left some books. I also had two poet pals visit me for a few days each – Phoebe Wang and Christine Minnery. I made a pilgrimage to Al's grave with both of them.

I really enjoyed the physical space of the cabin itself – the protection and privacy of the trees in the backyard, the nearby lake to go for a swim when I needed a break, the smell of the writing shed, the many different places to work throughout the cabin and the property. Not to mention the living history of the cabin itself, being able to putter around each room and look at the books and knickknacks and everything else that makes up a life lived by writer.

Jeff Latoski

Being at the A-Frame was restorative for my motivation to write poetry, simply because it allowed me to see evidence of a full life lived with this intention. The memorabilia and historical curio in the A-Frame helped me to see this, and being there for a full month allowed its power to sink in more fully. While I had initially designated my stay as time to

get reading done, I found myself writing again in a day-long regimen. I produced twelve new poems as well as several short non-fiction pieces.

My work became inspired by my experiences at the A-Frame. I wrote a poem about a boat in a field in Hallowell and spoke with the owner of the boat to get information not only on the boat but about the county in general. I learned about the history of canning in the county and how the economic landscape changed with the inclusion of Del Monte. I wrote poems about the seaweed in Roblin lake and the dairy farm close to Al's house, as well as visiting Al's grave. Most of the work I produced during this time was inspired by being in the county, which I was not expecting.

I was able to give a talk at the Picton library about a non-fiction book I am hoping to develop and being able to share my ideas in a new community setting allowed me to understand the strengths and weaknesses of my current approach.

Mark Jacquemain

While at the A-Frame, I focused on drafting a Middle Grade novel which is in its early stages. I completed three new chapters and polished four others. I also did final edits of several short stories. At least four of these stories were completed and two others received new frameworks for completion. I created a presentation on children's literature aimed at both general audiences and aspiring writers which I delivered at the Picton library.

The A-Frame is truly a homey, idiosyncratic source of creative inspiration. To wake to the misty lake, to wander evenings under the watchful gaze of Al and Eurithe from their many photographs—it was to feel the pull of the work. It is unique to spend three weeks alone in an abode that really feels like someone else's home—that still holds in its walls the spirit of the Purdys—and therefore the A-Frame will stay with me, just as its timbres have found their way into my writing.

Emily McGiffin

The first Friday of my residency, I drove to Toronto to deliver a guest lecture to an Environmental Writing Class at York University entitled "Anthropocene Poetics and the Industrial Sublime." This was an excellent opportunity to speak to a class of students about my work that I would not have been able to take advantage of were it not for the Al Purdy residency [Emily lives in BC]

I began to go through the historical materials I had gathered from the York University library and from the Prince Edward County Public Library, organizing and planning my reading and research about Upper Canada in the 1820s. My goal was not only to learn more about this historical period but also to steep myself in the readings and the local environment in order to evoke the landscape and period in my manuscript.

I biked out to Tyendinaga to meet with Amy Brant, Research Assistant with the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte. Amy answered many of my questions about the Six Nations, the Simcoe Deed, and the Upper Mohawk Tract and offered suggestions for further research. . The residency gave me the opportunity to orient myself and the work geographically. In November the manuscript was accepted for publication by Oskana Poetry Series.