

When I finished I knew who the heroes were, for me. They were the men and women who travelled to Europe to fight for a cause and soon admitted they were fighting for the man standing next to them in the trenches, countries be damned! They were the men and women who came home and had to live with the sights, sounds, and smells of war for the rest of their lives. And the people who had stayed behind, only to deal with the forever-changed relations who returned "alive" to them in 1918. I wonder how that Englishwoman coped with her husband, if he returned. I wonder if he screamed in the night, thinking he was being covered in lime.

The road into the past is indeed a difficult one to travel. Each generation provides new maps, coloured by its own views. I selected the map I wanted to follow, and there met hundreds of thousands of heroes, my personal heroes, caught body and soul in a disaster that changed the world.

**Linda Granfield** grew up in the history-rich Boston area, and for nearly 25 years has been mining Canada's wealth of non-fiction treasures for her nine children's titles. Forthcoming books for 1997 include *Circus: An Album* (Douglas & McIntyre), and *Amazing Grace: The Story of the Hymn* (Tundra).

## INSPIRATIONS

*Bernice Thurman Hunter*

**Résumé:** L'auteur relate sa rencontre avec Lucy Maud Montgomery, dont l'influence fut déterminante dans le choix et l'orientation de sa carrière littéraire.



Bernice Thurman Hunter

Like most authors I know, I have loved writing from early childhood and my favourite subject in school was "composition." But my writing career didn't take off until much later in life.

I began with short stories. My first serious attempt was a story called "Imagination." I was pretty sure it was a good story, but I didn't know what to do with it. As luck would have it, Lyn Cook, one of Canada's dearest authors, was my daughter's Sunday School teacher. So I asked her to read my story. Lucky for me she liked it and told me where to send it. But she said it had to be typed and double-spaced! I didn't own a typewriter, so I went next door and begged to use my neighbour's. I mailed my story off to Holt Rinehart and they must have liked it too because they published it and sent me a cheque for \$200! I promptly bought a typewriter (second-hand electric) and my career was launched.

My first book, *That Scatterbrain Booky* (pronounced Boo-key, please!), published by Scholastic, came about almost by accident. I was searching my mind for another short story idea; lots of interesting things happened when I was a kid, I thought, so why not write about them? I decided to write about the birth of my baby brother. Born at home, on my birthday in 1932, his arrival was a thrilling event. As I wrote one memory triggered another, and another and another. Pretty soon I had 100 scribbled pages. By this time I began to hope that this was not a short story, but perhaps the makings of a book.

Two more "Booky" books followed to complete the trilogy.

I began the third one, *As Ever Booky*, with the most wondrous event of my early teens: my meeting with L.M. Montgomery. Once again, Lady Luck played a part in my life. On my first day of high school I met a girl who lived next door to my idol. And she managed to wangle us an invitation to Saturday afternoon tea. My memories of that day are vivid still. It was a sunny September afternoon in 1937. Instead of being speechless in the great lady's presence, I started to babble, pouring out my adoration, which she accepted with a gracious smile. Fortunately, I ran out of breath.

We were served tea in the garden by a lady in an apron. (Perhaps she was L.M.'s maid ... I am not sure). On a silver tray were china tea-cups and green cheese pinwheel sandwiches and pink iced bonbons. I had never seen such romantic food before.

While sipping her tea, Mrs. Macdonald (L.M.'s married name) read the story I had had the temerity to bring. Trying to impress her, I told her I liked story-writing much better than school-work. Her advice still rings in my ears. "Keep writing ... you have a lively imagination and your characters ring true ... but (a big but!) do not ever put your writing before your studies. Nobody needs higher education more than a writer."

I got stuck on those well-meant words for many years. Then, with Lyn Cook's help, I broke free. Now, all these years later, my work is being compared to L.M. Montgomery's. Wouldn't she be surprised?

I am presently working on my twelfth novel, once again set in by-gone days. To my great satisfaction, I have found that today's children love to read about the past, and they easily relate to yesterday's children. I have often said the kids haven't changed; only the world has changed.

A good example of this is the letter I received from a nine-year-old boy who, after reading *A Place for Margaret* (a true story set on a farm near Shelbourne, Ontario in 1925), wrote: "If I get my dad to drive me in a big wide circle around Shelbourne, do you think I might see 'Starr' galloping in a meadow?" It didn't even occur to him that a horse, full-grown in 1925, couldn't possibly be alive today.

A twelve-year-old girl, who had just finished reading the "Booky" books, paid me the ultimate compliment. With a sigh she said, "I wish I was a kid when you were a kid so we could have been best friends."

One other little anecdote I'll include for your amusement. During one of my

recent school visits, a saucy, bright-eyed boy said to me, “How do you remember what happened so long ago? That stuff is history!”

Imagine my amazement when I found out that my past is now considered history. Oh, well ... c'est la vie!

**Bernice Thurman Hunter** won the *IODE* award for *That Scatterbrain Booky* and the *Vicky Metcalfe* award for a body of work. The sequel to Amy's *Promise* will appear shortly.

## BALANCING PAST AND PRESENT

*Kit Pearson*

**Résumé:** L'auteur parle de son désir de montrer aux jeunes, dans ses romans historiques, les différences et les similitudes entre les mentalités du passé et celle du présent: et cela, afin de faire prendre conscience aux lecteurs des horreurs de la guerre et de leur insuffler l'idée que l'amour et le courage l'emporteront toujours sur les pulsions destructrices de l'Histoire.



Photo credit: Russell Kelly

Kit Pearson

The most interesting problem I have encountered writing historical fiction is that of *balance*: balance between the past and the present, between what is different and what is the same. Obviously, I am drawn to this genre because I have a strong interest in the time period of my novel. Children, however, live in the present. I have to assume, therefore, that my audience is not aware of, and probably does not share, my intense interest in and my knowledge of another time.

My young readers would agree with the famous first line of L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.” To children, my first two novels, *The Daring Game* (set in 1964-65) and *A Handful of Time* (partly set in 1949) are historical fiction, although they aren't to the author! Nylons, pin curls, Canada getting a new flag, girls being treated differently from boys: these are things readers have commented upon as being different from their experience. However, my World War II trilogy — *The Sky Is Falling*, *Looking At the Moon*, and *The Lights Go On Again* — was history to me as well as to my readers and I was much more aware in these books of the differences between then and now.

Differences are fascinating; and I tried to emphasize both the small and large contrasts between the 1940s and the present that children would find particularly interesting. Clothes (buttons instead of zippers, boys wearing short trousers or “brecks”) ... food (rationing, no bananas) ... listening to the radio instead of watching TV ... the attitude towards children: strictness about manners and behaviour both at home and in school, the way children were all treated the same