

word up

BC Book Prize Finalists Talk About Their Work

There must be something in the water, a current of creativity, perhaps. Four North Shore residents have come up swimming in nominations for the 21st Annual BC Book Prizes. The BC Book Prizes, established in 1985, celebrate the achievements of British Columbia writers and publishers.

Daniel Francis, Author

Nominated for Roderick Haig-Brown Regional Prize

Title: *LD: Mayor Louis Taylor and the Rise of Vancouver* (Arsenal Pulp Press)

LD chronicles in lively detail the life of Louis Taylor, the longest-serving mayor in Vancouver's history. Taylor's story is also the story of an adolescent Vancouver in the early 20th century, a young city experiencing growing pains. Known to many as "the worker's friend" for his opposition to the city's business elite, Taylor ran in 26 elections, 20 of which were for mayor. His public achievements, including the establishment of the airport, a town planning commission, and the water board, rival the shocking details of his private, including a wife addicted to opium, bigamy and divorce scandals.

Daniel Francis, author of many books on Canadian history including *National Dreams: Myth, Memory and the Canadian Imagination* and *The Imaginary Indian: the image of the Indian in Canadian culture*, came to *LD* with a different desire. "I grew up in Vancouver," says Francis. "I wanted to write about the city and I was interested in biography. A friend mentioned Taylor and I was intrigued by the fact that I'd never heard of him."

Taylor's left-wing, progressive politics added a spark to Francis's pen as did the fact that *LD* brought him back into the realm of

original sources. "Many of my books dissect stereotypes and examine other people's opinions about Canadian subject matter. *LD* got me back into research in newspapers and government documents." Taylor's family was thrilled especially because Taylor would finally get the attention locally that he deserves. Leads from the Taylor's great grandson helped Francis uncover some scandalous material about the mayor's early years and home life. "The exciting part," says Francis, "was finding undiscovered information about Taylor. It lived up to my expectations that writing biography is detective work."

Kirsti Wakelin, Illustrator

Nominated for Christie Harris Illustrated Children's Literature Prize (with authors Richard Thompson and Maggee Spicer)

Title: *When They Are Up* (Fitzhenry and Whiteside)

Based on a beloved nursery rhyme, *When They Are Up* is a delightful romp through the humorous antics of the Grand Old Duke of York's 10,000 men "when they are up," down, and in between. This wacky adaptation by authors Maggee Spicer and Richard Thompson is captured in Kirsti Wakelin's colourful, deck-of-cards-style illustrations, which convey the sense of order and confusion of the dutiful soldiers who stop halfway up to do silly things such as throw pies at each other, knit overcoats for rocks or wrestle with grizzly bears.

Wakelin, illustrator of *A Pod of Orcas* by Sheryl McFarlane and her newest title *Pig in the Middle* by Sally Fitz-Gibbon, says, "I needed two things for *When They Are Up*—a concept to bind the book together, creating a sub story and a look and feel for the little men. They needed to be genial, silly and approachable as well as look like they took their work seriously. I've always

loved playing card faces. They seemed to be the perfect solution for my characters. By illustrating the side panels in a card suit and hiding the corresponding one in the illustration, I essentially kept myself amused through the whole project."

Wakelin credits some influential books from her childhood in formulating her design sensibility including *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* by J.M. Barrie, illustrated by Arthur Rackham—"Pure magic, haunting and sad, with illustrations that inspired me from the first time I saw them"—and *Master Snickup's Cloak* by Alexander Theroux, illustrated by Brian Froud—"Full of delicious horrors."

Living on the North Shore has been good for her imagination. "Sometimes, in the middle of the night, I look out my window and see the bears frolicking on the street." Upon hearing about the BC Book Prize nomination, Wakelin says, "My insides did a little jump. It makes me feel that all the time, effort and thought was worth it."

Douglas Coupland, Author/Artist
Nominated for BC Booksellers Choice Award in Honour of Bill Duthie
Title: *Souvenir of Canada 2* (Douglas & McIntyre)

In *Souvenir of Canada 2*, Douglas Coupland returns to reinventing Canada with a vibrant mix of humour, powerful imagery and cultural commentary. Picking up where the bestseller *Souvenir of Canada* left off, Coupland uses personal anecdotes and his trademark visuals and artwork to create an eclectic and stunning view of our country. From striking railway photos to a tour of Nanaimo bars to a two-headed goose symbolizing the country's duality, Coupland puts a modern spin on Canadian identity.

"The Canada goose shown on the front cover is not the product of electronic image-manipulation ... it's made from two goose decoys that I fused together. I guess it could mean quite a few things. Canada's slightly screwy bilingual policy springs to mind. Perhaps more so, it refers to the breadth of the country, its two ends being as far away from each other as east is from west — with an extra-half hour tagged on for Newfoundland." —Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada 2*

Shelley Hrdlitschka, Author
Nominated for Sheila A. Egoff Children's Literature Prize
Title: *Kat's Fall* (Orca Book Publishers)

Kat's Fall charts the journey of 15-year-old Darcy, struggling to keep everything under control. With a mother in prison and an uncaring father, Darcy must take responsibility for raising his deaf, epileptic younger sister. Darcy is handling it all, except for a small problem with cutting himself. Then his mom is released from prison, and Darcy is accused of a terrible crime. His carefully ordered world spins wildly out of control.

Also nominated for a White Pine Award, this short novel by Shelley Hrdlitschka addresses a number of social issues:

self-injury, dysfunctional families, substance abuse and sexual abuse. Hrdlitschka, who cites *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham as an influential book from her youth, does not shy away from dark subject matter. "Years ago, when I read about Gillian Guess and that lady who dropped her baby off the Capilano Suspension Bridge, I was less interested in the stories of the women themselves, but of their children. How would having a mother like this affect a child's emotional development, especially a boy child? Would it spoil his future relationships with women? I pondered these questions for a few years, and then decided to explore them in a novel. *Kat's Fall* is not about either of these families, but it was those families that got me thinking of the questions."

Hrdlitschka has received a lot of positive feedback from adults who had been abused as kids. "As I was developing the character of Darcy, I found him shutting down emotionally. I wondered how he would release his internalized stress. One day I started writing and found the character cutting himself. I was amazed at this revelation. I then did some research on self-abuse and discovered that the character I had created perfectly fit the profile of a self-abuser."



ABOVE: DOUGLAS COUPLAND, BELOW: DANIEL FRANCIS

