

# CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

CANADA \$7 SPRING 2016 VOL.18, NO.2

FILM | TELEVISION | RADIO | DIGITAL MEDIA

Writing For Reality TV,  
A Real Thing

---

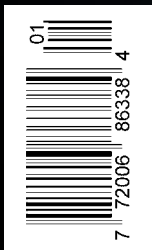
Letterkenny Problems  
= Jared Keeso's  
Opportunity

---

A Novel Solution

**Chris Haddock**  
“...No Ambition Beyond  
Churning Out The Best”

PM40011669







TSC

TORONTO  
SCREENWRITING  
CONFERENCE

# STIMULATE YOUR Story

[torontoscreenwritingconference.com](http://torontoscreenwritingconference.com)

WGC Members are eligible to receive \$80 off regular registration.  
Contact Li Robbins at the Writers Guild of Canada ([l.robbs@wgc.ca](mailto:l.robbs@wgc.ca)) to get your promo code.

APRIL 30 - MAY 1, 2016 // METRO TORONTO CONVENTION CENTRE // TORONTO, CANADA

FOUNDING SPONSOR



LEAD SPONSOR



PRESENTING SPONSORS

THE HAROLD  
GREENBERG  
FUND

TELEFILM  
CANADA



SUPPORTING SPONSORS





# CANADIAN SCREENWRITER

The Journal of the Writers Guild of Canada

Vol. 18 No. 2 Spring 2016

ISSN 1481-6253

Publication Mail Agreement Number  
400-11669

**Publisher** Maureen Parker

**Editor** Tom Villemaire  
[t.villemaire@wgc.ca](mailto:t.villemaire@wgc.ca)

**Director of Communications** Li Robbins

## Editorial Advisory Board

Denis McGrath (Chair)

Michael MacLennan

Susin Nielsen

Simon Racioppa

**President** Jill Golick (Central)

## Councillors

Michael Amo (Atlantic)

Mark Ellis (Central)

Dennis Heaton (Pacific)

Denis McGrath (Central)

Anne-Marie Perrotta (Quebec)

Andrew Wreggitt (Western)

**Art Direction** Studio Ours

**Printing** Ironstone Media

**Cover Photo:** Jeff Weddell

**Canadian Screenwriter is  
published three times a year by  
the Writers Guild of Canada (WGC).**

366 Adelaide Street West, Suite 401

Toronto, Ontario M5V 1R9

TEL: (416) 979-7907

FAX: (416) 979-9273

WEBSITE: [www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca)

Subscriptions: WGC members receive a  
subscription as part of their membership.  
Non-member subscriptions: \$20 for  
three issues.

Advertising policy: Readers should not  
assume that any products or services  
advertised in *Canadian Screenwriter* are  
endorsed by the WGC.

Editorial Policy: The WGC neither implicitly  
nor explicitly endorses opinions or attitudes  
expressed in *Canadian Screenwriter*.

Submissions are subject to editing for  
length, style and content.

Advertising Sales:

Visit [www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca) or contact Li Robbins at  
[l.robbs@wgc.ca](mailto:l.robbs@wgc.ca)

Letters to the editor are subject to editing  
for length. Not all letters are published.

## Contents

### Features

#### Chris Haddock: Back With CBC In The Romeo Section

A Canadian spy series from the mind that  
gave viewers *Intelligence*.

By Diane Wild

#### Writing For Reality TV

Who writes unscripted television? It appears a lot of  
people do. We talk to them about the ins and outs.

By Matthew Hays

#### Novel-Writing Screenwriters

Some screenwriters yearn for new challenges,  
want something, some freedom, they can't get from  
screenwriting and look for that something in novel  
writing. What do they find and why do they seek it?

By Mark Dillon

#### From YouTube Sensation To Something You Can CraveTV

*Letterkenny Problems* started off as a bit of Twitter fun  
for Jared Keeso and a pal from southwestern Ontario.

He tried it as a YouTube channel and it caught on.  
Now you can find out about darts and hockey players.

By Katherine Brodsky

### W-Files

**Rachel Langer** — By Greg David

**Fiona Highet** — By Cameron Archer

### Columns

**From the Editor/Contributors**

**Inside/Out** — Jill Golick

**"Oh Great Scribe..."** — Advice for  
the Scriptlorn

### News

**Beat Sheet**

**Spotlight**

**New Members**

**Money for Missing Writers**





## The Paths We Take

There's a cost for just about everything.

That's pretty clear when you look at life – especially when you face a decision between doing something you like and getting paid.

While those two things aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, if it were easy to get paid well for doing something you like, there would be a lot of vacancies in jobs no one other than the odd fetishist would enjoy.

So, many people are forced to work in jobs that pay just because they pay.

Given the choice, screenwriters (like many people) might want to run free, physically and in the imaginary sense.

If they have hair, they want the wind blowing through it. God bless 'em.

This is not to say it's wrong to enjoy writing within someone else's vision for a show.

But if you want to push that audio-visual envelope or even just write what you want to write, it's hard to find people who will give you complete freedom and who are willing to pay you for that. There are constraints. There are notes. There are rejections.

On the other hand, it's a free world, so you *can* write what you want. Of course, it being a free world, no one is obliged to pay you for it.

But, if it turns out that you do write something people want, you can (hopefully) make some money from it.

As we see in the feature we have on screenwriters who have turned to novel writing, that risk can bring rewards.

Of course, in TV, the hard part is convincing people with money to take a chance on your creative vision. Nothing is a hit until, well, it is. Given how impossible that is to predict, and given the amounts of money at stake on any given project, perhaps it's not surprising people would rather go the safe route.

Even so, earning a living by writing is pretty sweet.

I'm not saying it's easy. But before I started earning regular money as a writer/editor almost 35 years ago, I had tried 23 other jobs.

For example, I drove transport trucks, moved furniture, museum exhibits and oil patch equipment, guarded a brewery, ran a golf course, set up gear in a recording studio, built displays at a Sears store, salvaged burned out businesses, demolished structures, bounced at a nightclub, at various times was a day labourer on farms, roofer, industrial painter, furniture maker, woodworker, survey technician and cab driver, built stone fences, stocked huge bags of sugar and flour in a warehouse, and took cars apart at a wrecking yard to name a few. Some were fun, some were horrible.

One thing I learned was sometimes there is just not enough money to do some things and other times you can't believe you're getting paid for what you're doing.

Even as a writer/editor, that is still true. In this issue we hear from screenwriters who explore the avenue of novels as a creative outlet which appears to provide pay and challenge to scratch that itch. ■

— Tom Villemaire

### Spring 2015

**Cameron Archer** runs the Canadian television/media website Gloryosky (<http://www.sweetposer.com/>), and is also a freelance arts writer. He currently lives in Eastern Ontario.

A freelance arts and entertainment writer, **Katherine Brodsky** has written for *Variety*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Weekend*, *Mashable*, *Elle Canada*, *MovieMaker Magazine*, *The Independent*, *Stage Directions*, and many others. She has interviewed a diverse range of intriguing personalities, including Oscar, Emmy, Grammy, Tony, and Pulitzer winners. In her spare time she wears sunglasses at night and runs her own cult, Katherineology. Follow her on Twitter @mysteriouskat

**Mark Dillon** is a Toronto-based freelance journalist and former editor of *Playback* magazine. He is author of the award-winning *Fifty Sides of The Beach Boys*.

**Matthew Hays** is a Montreal-based writer, author, and university and college instructor. His articles have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Vice*, *Maclean's*, *The Walrus*, *Cineaste*, *POV*, and *The Toronto Star*. He teaches courses in film studies at Marianopolis College

and Concordia University. His book, *The View from Here: Conversations with Gay and Lesbian Filmmakers* (Arsenal Pulp), won a 2008 Lambda Literary Award and he received the Concordia President's Award for Teaching Excellence for 2013-14.

After completing a commercial arts program in college, specifically taken for developing his photography, **Jeff Weddell** began working as a photographer over 30 years ago, covering all aspects of the field, from commercial, advertising, corporate portraiture and fine arts. Jeff also works in film and television capturing production stills, as well as gallery portraits for networks and studios from around the globe.

**Diane Wild** is a Vancouver-based writer and editor who runs the TV, eh? website ([www.tv-eh.com](http://www.tv-eh.com)) about Canadian television.

For over 15 years, **Greg David** was a television critic for *TV Guide Canada*, the country's most trusted source for TV news. A former member of the Television Critics Association, he is currently a partner at TV-Eh.com, a website devoted to covering the Canadian television industry.



## The Guild Is At Your Side

I've never been big on the status quo. In university, I stuffed student mailboxes with flyers from the Student Committee for Action on Education and was in the front row for every protest outside the administration building.

A little more than 25 years ago, when writers started talking about breaking away from the mother guild we shared with actors, I was in. I baked cookies for meetings and coordinated phone trees. An organization for writers created and run by writers!? Who wouldn't jump on board?

Never mind that the ship we were jumping from was an established, financially-secure guild with tens of thousands of members to our measly... 1,000? And that was only if every ACTRA writer agreed to come with us.

I was a newish member back then and young as writers go. Even though I'd already served a term on the council of the ACTRA Writers Guild, I had no clue what we were getting into.

Thank God for Pete White. In the early days of the WGC, Pete had a vision for what the Guild could become and he knew how to build an organization. He and I didn't always get along. Pete could be cantankerous and authoritative and we've already established that I'm not good with authority. But Pete was a true leader. He put the current guild structure in place and taught me just about everything I know about bargaining.

Looking back on 25 years of the Writers Guild of Canada, I'm in awe of the organization writers built for themselves. We're 2,200 members strong now and have welcomed story editors, animation writers and digital writers into the fold. We've got solid collective agreements that keep getting better, a glossy magazine, the best awards show in the country (perhaps, the world), a collection society that has collected \$11 million for writers, and a respected voice that's heard throughout the industry and in the halls of government.

We have an outstanding professional staff of 23 skilled, smart, hard-working people who I like to refer to as the greatest staff on the planet. Our Executive Director, Maureen Parker, holds the vision now, guided by the Council and the many other writers who are her brain-trust.

The sole mission of the WGC is to serve writers; to better our lives and working conditions. It's doing a damn good job and every member can be proud of this. We built this... some by sitting on committees or coming to membership meetings, others by serving on WGC Award juries or an arbitration panel. And all of us by pooling our money and refusing to work non-union.

We've built something solid, responsive and smart. The WGC is a flexible forward-thinking organization. As the industry sheds its skin and slithers into its next incarnation, our Guild will be at our side, fighting our fight.

This is one status quo I'm quite happy with. ■

— **Jill Golick**

## The WGC Policy Decoder



Some relish discussions about exhibition requirements, simultaneous substitution, and documents beginning with words like “application” and “amendments.” Others, not so much. If you’re in the latter category, the “WGC Policy Decoder” is for you. Each issue of *Canadian Screenwriter* will include a “policy decoder,” breaking down issues that matter to screenwriters. This edition decodes “CIPF review.”

**What’s the Big Idea:** The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) recently concluded a review of Certified Independent Production Funds (CIPFs). The CRTC put some big questions on the table, and the WGC responded.

**Why Care:** CIPFs deliver around \$50 million in funding annually to Canadian programming. Most CIPFs get their funding the same way the Canada Media Fund (CMF) does — through regulated contributions from cable and satellite TV companies, or “broadcasting distribution undertakings” (BDUs). CIPFs include the Bell Broadcast

and New Media Fund, Cogeco Program Development Fund, Independent Production Fund, Harold Greenberg Fund, Rogers Documentary Fund, Shaw Rocket Fund, and Telefilm Canada. While CIPFs deliver a small-to-moderate chunk of production funding in Canada, they are an important piece of the financing puzzle, and CRTC decisions for them can set precedents that could ripple through to other funders.

**Where’s It Going:** The WGC submitted detailed written comments to the CRTC in two phases, tackling a number of key issues important to screenwriters. For starters, the guild argued that the Canadian production sector needs a stronger focus on development, and that a creator-centred culture should predominate. This means more CIPFs should deliver more funding to script and concept development. Unfortunately, there were also proposals on the table to reduce the minimum CAVCO point requirements (used to determine the “Canadianness” of a project’s talent) from its current 8-out-of-10.

The WGC strongly opposed these proposals, arguing that Canadian talent is fundamental to our system, and that those making the proposals hadn’t sufficiently supported them with real evidence. Also discussed were non-broadcaster funding triggers, reporting issues, and funding for digital content. The full submissions are on the WGC website ([wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)). At press time, the CRTC hasn’t released the results of this review. A decision should happen in the coming months, and once it’s out the guild will monitor its impacts on screenwriters.

## Corus to buy Shaw Media

In early January it was announced that Corus Entertainment is buying Shaw Media from Shaw Communications — for \$2.65 billion. Shaw Communications is a “vertically integrated” media company that provides cable television, Internet, and wireless services; it also owns Shaw Media, which includes the Global over-the-air television network, as well as specialty channels such as Showcase, Life Network, History Television, and HGTV. All of these assets will move to Corus, leaving Shaw to focus on its cable and telecommunications businesses, while continuing to own its stake in the streaming service, Shomi. A Corus press release announced that Barbara Williams, current Executive Vice President, Broadcasting and President, Shaw Media, “will join Corus in a senior leadership capacity upon the closing of the transaction.”

Normally, transactions involving broadcasting assets trigger the CRTC’s “Tangible Benefits Policy,” which ensures that the transaction is in the public interest by requiring purchasers

to make financial commitments to new spending on Canadian programming. However, the policy only applies to transactions that change the “ownership or effective control” of broadcasting undertakings. In this case, even though they are separate companies, both Shaw Media and Corus Entertainment are owned by JR Shaw, so Corus has argued that no benefits are payable because the ownership and control are ultimately the same. At press time, the CRTC launched an expedited public process to consider the transaction, and the WGC will be examining it closely to ensure that screenwriters’ voices are heard.

### **25th Anniversary Year Kicks Off**



2016 is a landmark year for the WGC, as the guild celebrates 25 years of working on behalf of Canadian screenwriters. The anniversary will be marked throughout the year, kicked off by an event in Vancouver in late February that featured a lively panel discussion about writing and the history of the guild. Stay tuned to the WGC website ([wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)) for more info on all “WGC @25” celebrations.

### **WGC goes to Ottawa**

With the new Liberal government settling in in Ottawa, the WGC is travelling to the national capital to discuss your issues with federal decision-makers. The WGC is pleased to work with new Minister of Canadian Heritage Mélanie Joly, her staff, and with all in government to ensure that the Canadian film and television continues to thrive. The sector is facing challenges on a number of fronts, and the policy tools that helped build the industry in the analog world are increasingly ill-suited to the digital one. Yet effective policies are still required to ensure screenwriters have a voice in an increasingly crowded global milieu. WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker, and Director of Policy Neal McDougall, have begun engaging with politicians and senior bureaucrats and will continue to do so in the months to come.

### **The New Writers’ Directory**

The WGC’s new members’ directory will be a go-to source for both Canadian and international producers seeking the best writing talent. If you’re a member and you haven’t updated or created your profile in the directory yet, please make sure that you do so. It’s easy: you’ll find step by step directions on the WGC website.

### **Awards Season**

The Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television announced the nominations for the 2016 Canadian Screen Awards in late January, and congratulations goes out to the many WGC members whose work was nominated. The WGC looks forward to celebrating the winners during The Academy’s “Canadian Screen Week” (March 7-13). As well,

the guild congratulates Karen Walton, winner of the special Margaret Collier Award for writing. Karen’s work includes the cult classic, *Ginger Snaps*, as well as writing for series such as *Queer As Folk*, *Orphan Black*, and *Flashpoint*. Karen is also a past recipient of the WGC Screenwriting Awards “Writers’ Block,” for service to the guild and to the national screenwriting community. Speaking of the WGC awards, mark your calendars for May 2, 2016. The 20th WGC Screenwriting Awards gala takes place on that date at Koerner Hall in Toronto.

### **Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters Wraps**

The Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters program is wrapping after six exciting years. The training initiative was designed to bring new voices and perspectives into the writers’ rooms of Canadian English-language television series. It gave aspiring screenwriters the opportunity to learn from talented WGC members, who generously shared their expertise. Ultimately over 70 writers participated in the program, with winners of a paid internship going to work in the rooms of shows including *19-2*, *Bitten*, *The Code*, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *The Listener*, *Motive*, *Mr. D*, and *The Stanley Dynamic*. Program grads have gone on to win many awards and to work as writers on shows like *Continuum*, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *Killjoys*, and *The Next Step*. The WGC would like to say thank-you to the many members who were so instrumental as mentors and workshop leaders. As well, a tremendous thanks to the program’s dedicated director, Deanna Cadette. ■



# WHERE ART THOU, CHRIS HADDOCK?

---

By Diane Wild

Parting is such sweet sorrow. Except, maybe, when your beloved show is cancelled on a cliff-hanger after just two seasons.







Chris Haddock and CBC parted ways noisily after the demise of *Intelligence*, the Vancouver-based showrunner's 2005-07 serialized drama that ended with the main character wounded in a drive-by shooting.

"I got over that in about 24 hours," says Haddock. "With the birth of every show, you know cancellation is coming sometime. If you're on an American network you can be off the air in two episodes, so the fact we got two good years was nice."

While "patiently waiting for the CBC regime to change," he moved to New York and worked on *Boardwalk Empire*. With Heather Conway's installation as executive vice president of English services in late 2013, the public broadcaster turned its sights to more serialized, premium-quality shows, and one day, Haddock got a call from Sally Catto, the general manager of programming.

"I've been a fan of Chris's since my earlier days at CBC," says Catto, who had worked with him on *Intelligence* and characterizes him as "an incredible talent with a unique and distinct voice."

With her desire to bring more cable-like shows to the table, she thought, "who better than Chris?" When she asked him what ideas he had percolating, *The Romeo Section* bubbled up.

"... you don't have a big budget, so it comes down to actors and dialogue, and that's our root."

The series feels like a cousin to *Intelligence* in style and substance. Andrew Airlie plays ex-spy Wolfgang McGee, a professor with a freelance side job managing a roster of "Romeo and Juliet" spies – informants engaged in intimate relations with intelligence targets. Haddock has long held an interest in espionage, with sources from his *Intelligence* days helping him delve into the real-world issues involved. "As a writer, I need to have one foot in the truth and then I can let the rest of myself wander."

Haddock said exploring the espionage theme is "something I've wanted to do for a long time. I'd been trying to look for the right formula. It goes way back to the second year of *Da Vinci* when I wanted to create a spin-off out of *Da Vinci*, but then it took a long time to get *Intelligence* going. I first started talking to [*Romeo Section* executive producer/director] Steve Surjik about this particular concept a few years ago. And then the CBC tapped me and asked me if I was interested in coming back and doing something for them."

Given his long history at CBC, there were few surprises for either side in the rekindled relationship.

"You have to have a lot of trust," says Catto, who knew she had to be prepared to work the way Haddock works, noting his understated writing style depends heavily on the execution of a line or the glance of a character. "Chris often won't tell you where he's going in the series, which is unusual given we're the broadcaster. But you choose who you work with carefully and then honour that vision."

"He has a very strong belief that he wants us to be the audience," she says. "He wants us to react and give feedback not knowing what's coming. It's not completely hands off, but it's more feedback at the cut stage. And his cuts come in so strong it's more general discussion than getting into the details."

"One of the great benefits of working with CBC is they've worked with me before and they know I'm not going to be calling them with line changes," says Haddock. "We get our talking done with the network early. They send their notes on every script and we work with them, argue with them. It's always about making it better. They see things we don't see."

Haddock's year of working for *Boardwalk Empire* – the first time in a dozen or so years he wasn't the boss – helped him reflect on his own showrunning style. He found it a liberating luxury to be able to see the job from a distance.

"I got to work with such stellar actors in New York and we had a room full of fantastic writers. Everyone in that room had some kind of prize – an Emmy, a Pulitzer. It was a much slower-paced show with almost theatrical staging. I could study how to approach that, taking the risk to stage a dramatic scene and keeping the pace down."

That meshed with Haddock's own approach, though with his work in Canada, "a lot of it is budget constraints – you don't have a big budget, so it comes down to actors and dialogue, and that's our root. We've been doing that style for a long time."

Since *The Romeo Section*'s main character is an academic, Haddock wanted a pace that mirrored





Romeo Section's Andrew Airlie and Juan Riedinger.

that world, allowing for thoughtfulness, moments of reading, writing, and lecturing.

On set, that meant going against trend and eliminating handheld cameras in favour of dollies, for example. "This is really about the characters and the looks between them and the things left unsaid, so we need to keep the camera less busy and more focused on the actors."

*Boardwalk* creator and showrunner Terence Winter's style was to spend most of his time in the writing room managing the writers rather than on set, something Haddock does not emulate.

"We don't have a writers' room, we have a writers' closet," he says of his *Romeo* team, which consists of Haddock, Jesse McKeown (*Da Vinci's Inquest*, 19-2) and actor/novelist Stephen E. Miller, who had been slated to write *Da Vinci's* novels for Penguin until his own material took off.

Haddock had larger rooms when working in Los Angeles, and was one of eight on *Boardwalk Empire*, but he jokes that "management of writers is a full-time job because they're all a bit squirrely ... with the exception of me."

"Where I've been successful in the past with a larger writing room is to look forward down the line at turning points in the storyline," says Haddock, "but the actual nitty gritty, it's a focused operation."

He considers the math in Canada of small budgets and short season orders, but also simply finds working with a small staff more productive. While mapping out *The Romeo Section*, the three writers weren't even in the same city, instead meeting by phone five days a week. "You eliminate all the time spent wanting a coffee, wanting another coffee, wanting a smoke break, then wanting another coffee," he says. "Our time together was reduced to maybe a couple hours a day and it allowed the rest of our day to arrange to our own daily writing habits."

He compares that to full days in a typical writers' room where "after all that yacking you have to produce the work. A lot of days you aren't left with a lot of writing time and you've burned your molecules on the writer jams."

His showrunning style has evolved partly from his desire to carve out time to be on set as the



voice in charge. “I’m there helping people feel calm, I liaise with various departments, I do the things that are unavailable to a director coming in.”

He’s also there grabbing the on-set energy and running with it, allowing inspiration to happen but relying more on a solidly-crafted script going into it. He will often reject line changes that “sound fresh because it’s the first time we’ve heard it,

whereas the original sounds stale because we’ve rehearsed it five times. But that’s like changing your bet at the wicket.”

He has little patience for eating set time for continuity, as in making sure details look the same from one shot to another. “Nobody cares. That’s not the kind of show we’re doing. Leave the hair alone. It was the same thing down in LA. I told the



---

“I’m there helping  
people feel calm, I liaise with various  
departments, I do the things  
that are unavailable to a  
director coming in.”

Teamsters to stop washing the cars. In every show, the car looks like it’s off the showroom no matter how old it is.”

Above all, just as CBC allows him autonomy, he trusts those around him to do their jobs well. Because *Romeo* was shot in digital he knew they could shoot reams of footage “and the poor assistant editors have to log all that. We shot as if it was film in very few takes.”

The directors blocked out scenes tightly, the actors didn’t need to provide “infinite variations of a performance,” and Haddock stayed out of the editing room as much as possible, preferring to see what the director and editor found in the story and tweaking if he had notes.

His results have generated acclaim, and ratings for *The Romeo Section*’s first season were about on par with what *Intelligence* garnered, with 10 years of additional audience fragmentation to factor in. “In a fiercely competitive environment for people’s eyeballs, they’ve done a terrific job,” Haddock says of CBC. “I think they’ve backed the show to the greatest extent they could rationally allow themselves.”

While Catto acknowledges she wishes more people were watching, “I definitely knew with Chris’s work it’s more niche, and by the nature of serialized storytelling, I know you’re appealing to a certain audience that would be smaller than some of our series that are more episodic.”

She stops short of blaming the Toronto Blue Jays for their incredible run that seeped into the

fall premiere season and cannibalized some of the audience, and ponders what effect advertising breaks have on the audience of a complexly plotted show of the kind more commonly seen on cable or Netflix.

Regardless, she says “I think it’s an outstanding series. We’re so proud of it and we’re proud to be working with Chris. He’s an original and a brilliant writer. We’re lucky to be working with him. It’s also great to see Vancouver reflected on the public broadcaster and he does that in such an organic way.”

Haddock’s experience away from Vancouver taught him something else: “I realized the best conditions I could possibly get I had had at the CBC for most of the time I worked there.”

He cites his familiarity with Vancouver and his belief that specificity of setting allows for more grounded storytelling with international appeal, as well as his comfortable relationships with the network, international distributor, directors, producers and key personnel on the show. “I have the best of all worlds here.”

Despite our era of supposedly “peak TV,” Haddock sees the number of outlets for the kind of show he delivers as limited. “The niche markets have boomed, and everyone seems to attract a smallish audience. Because they’re subscription services that’s doable. CBC has given me the backing of a broadcast network while looking for the aesthetics of a cable show.

“I’ve got no ambition beyond churning out the best stuff I can for the Canadian audience.” ■



*Clockwise from above:  
Deborah Wilton, Tami Gabay,  
and Nathalie Younglai*



---

# IT'S THE REAL THING

---

By Matthew Hays

*Writers talk about the ups, downs, highs and lows of writing reality TV.*

From travel shows to home-reno porn, reality TV shows now permeate much of the Canadian TV landscape. Their ascendance is not simply due to audience tastes, of course; they appeal to broadcasters and producers because they are relatively inexpensive to create. Still, despite widespread popularity, the writing of such shows often remains mysterious, even to industry veterans.

In an effort to pull back the curtain on reality TV, *Canadian Screenwriter* contacted five writers with extensive experience writing both reality TV and more traditional forms of scripted television. (One writer requested the right to remain anonymous.)

(Editor's note: Writers should also go to the WGC website and check out the Reality/Factual Writers and the WGC pamphlet: <http://goo.gl/0McPJP>)

## Tami Gabay

A 15-year TV veteran, Tami Gabay has worked on many shows including *Urban Suburban* and *The Liquidator*. She is the 2014 Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters Program western internship winner.

**Writing reality TV seems odd to some people because they don't think of it as scripted. How would you most succinctly describe the act of writing reality TV?**

Real life is very messy, like a tangled, jumbled ball of yarn. Writing reality is untangling that mess. Depending on a show format, premises and back-story often will need to be explained, narration may be needed, drafting questions for the people we are following are key and then you comb the footage to craft the story top to bottom. If you can weave all the threads together, you can end up with an impressive result, instead of something that may have ended up glued to a kindergartener's tragic art project.

“In many respects the criteria and gold standard for story arcs that have defined drama apply to the reality writing. The substance of the story has to check off all the boxes.”

**How is it different from writing a drama or sitcom?**

In drama and comedy you are starting with a blank page of endless possibilities. In reality TV, the people featured are whole, carrying around heartbreak, love, wants, fears, and plenty of quirks. Their lives have had a certain trajectory that narrows how they move through the world. We shepherd their story and hopefully underscore that ordinary people do and say funny, weird and profound things.

**Do you work alone or in groups?**

Both. A writer will work on an individual episode, but throughout there is group feedback. Fresh pairs of eyes are so critical to ensuring that the story integrity, tone, and content are solid. And if there is something big that needs to be tackled, which there always is, groupthink is invaluable.

**How do the processes of writing reality TV and writing drama inform each other?**

In many respects the criteria and gold standard for story arcs that have defined drama apply to the reality writing. The substance of the story has to check off all the boxes. If it doesn't, there's an overwhelmingly good chance that it's going to be limp content. And honestly, nobody likes limp, not even in tofu.

**What's the most challenging thing about writing reality TV?**

The obvious downside is that you have no control over what's about to unfold or the material you're

handed to shape. You can find yourself saying, “Why in God's name would they say or do that? Seriously? Arrrrrrgh!” You have to find a way to smooth out half thoughts, incongruent choices and make sense of it all.

**What's the most rewarding thing about writing reality TV?**

I'm a glutton for punishment. The lack of control that makes it so challenging is also what makes it so great. There are pleasant surprises. Plenty of times I've uttered the words, “What???! That's amazing. You've got to be kidding me?” They aren't kidding and then you get to tell that story. Better than any porterhouse steak. Really.

**David Schmidt**

Currently supervising story editor on *Timber Kings*, David Schmidt has served as creative producer on *Diagnose Me*, head writer on *Million Dollar Neighbourhood*, and worked on the scripted series *Shattered* and *Falcon Beach* (as executive story editor).

**Writing reality TV seems odd to some people because they don't think of it as scripted. How would you most succinctly describe the act of writing reality TV?**

It's an oversimplification, but, essentially, you write the story after it's been shot, which is often as odd as it sounds, but that's how we roll.

“In the end, all great television stories need the same elements: conflict, humour, something viewers can identify with and/or be moved by.”

---

### **How is it different from writing a drama or sitcom?**

There are different formats in reality TV, so how you write them differs. On some shows you have to conceptualize scenes and story arcs, and write up beat sheets — which serve as the shooting blueprint — as well as write dialogue for the hosts. On a more documentary-style show, you shape the episode in the story editing process after it's been filmed. On "recree" (re-creation) series, you write entire scripts, but you also have to story edit in interview clips. But the main difference is that in reality TV writers don't get craft services.

### **Do you work alone or in groups?**

Shows generally operate in one of two ways. The first is very much like scripted television: a group of writers/story editors are supervised by a head writer, and, together, they brainstorm ideas, with each episode eventually being assigned to a writer. The other type of process is freelance style, but for the entire season. Some combination of showrunner, creative producer and/or head writer oversee the creation of pitch documents, which are then assigned to writers, who often work from home, for scripting. But either way you can wear your PJs and drink on the job.

### **How do the processes of writing reality TV and writing drama inform each other?**

In the end, all great television stories need the same elements: conflict, humour, something viewers can identify with and/or be moved by. I find that crafting those stories out of different processes makes me more aware of the specifics of all of the moving parts and how to put them together better in each format. Hopefully.

### **What's the most challenging thing about writing reality TV?**

With the exception of the recrea format, you have to sift through countless hours of footage to find your story — and you're ultimately limited by what's been shot. It forces you to find solutions that are often far from obvious in order to address notes. In scripted TV, the shaping of story happens before shooting, so you're only limited by your imagination — and that pesky budget, of course.

### **What's the most rewarding thing about writing reality TV?**

The stories are often more inspiring to work on, because regardless of how much you try to shape things as a writer, the reality of what's happening to the people you're filming always shines through. Also, the work hours in reality TV are more reasonable. And I find that people who work in reality TV check their ego at the door a lot more than people who work in scripted TV. Generally, you deal with way less bullshit.

### **Nathalie Younglai**

Nathalie Younglai is an alumnus of the WGC-Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters Program. She has directed for Slice and Food Network, and story edited on *Tessa & Scott* (W), nominated for the 2015 CSA's Best Factual Series. Nathalie was senior story producer on *You Gotta Eat Here! Specials* (Food Network) and currently writes on a preschool animation series.

“In drama, the writing is on the page. In reality/lifestyle, the writing is in the edit suite. You're writing for real people, not actors, so you can't expect people to 'perform on demand.' ”

### **Writing reality TV seems odd to some people because they don't think of it as scripted. How would you most succinctly describe the act of writing reality TV?**

The shooting script is blue sky — what you hope to get in your ideal world. I then write interview questions designed to draw out the most emotions from “the talent” and to provoke conflict. The real writing and story building happens in post, when you get the hours of raw material, and there's little or no conflict and you have to create it with small moments and looks and build your story from there. And then you're writing the shortest possible VO to help weave the story together. Basically, it's working backwards.

### **How is it different from writing a drama or a sitcom?**

In drama, the writing is on the page. In reality/lifestyle, the writing is in the edit suite. You're writing for real people, not actors, so you can't expect people to “perform on demand.” At least, not convincingly. You're creating scenarios that you hope and pray and pray will happen on shoot day.



**Do you work alone or in groups?**

I work in close collaboration with the editor and producer.

**How do the processes of writing reality TV and writing drama inform each other?**

Drama reminds me to set up and pay off. Reality/lifestyle reminds me we need conflict, conflict, conflict to drive a compelling story. And, it has forced me to write fast.

**What the most challenging thing about writing reality TV?**

You can only work with what was shot and how it was shot. And often the most real moments happen off-camera or after they cut. No re-shoots. There's often no time for nuance or time to let scenes breathe. Being looked down upon by "real writers."

**What's the most rewarding thing about writing reality TV?**

Frankenedits. Collaborating with quirky editors who are as socially awkward as me. The mindf\*\*k that happens when you have to shift your perspective and view the footage beyond what was shot, linearly.

**Deborah Wilton**

Wilton has worked in both scripted and unscripted television for more than 20 years, with credits on shows for YTV, National Geographic, History, Discovery, BBC, ITV, ABC Family, and Television New Zealand.

“Despite what your uncle insists about how ‘fake’ it all is, you’re generally *not* in control of what your subjects say or do in front of the camera. ”

**Writing reality TV seems odd to some people because they don’t think of it as scripted. How would you most succinctly describe the act of writing reality TV?**

Reality TV has so many sub-genres (competitive, documentary, celebrity, self-improvement, social experiment, hidden camera, and so on) that generalizing about ‘writing’ for it is very difficult; for every rule, there’s an exception. You might be writing voiceover for a rigidly prescribed format, you might be crafting slice-of-life documentary from hours of seemingly disconnected footage. But, by and large, you are not writing dialogue scripts — unless you’re working on docu-drama, and see how I just proved my own point? Overall, your focus is on story-telling — searching footage for compelling pieces of story that you and your editor can stitch together into a cohesive and satisfying whole.

**How is it different from writing a drama or a sitcom?**

Despite what your uncle insists about how ‘fake’ it all is, you’re generally *not* in control of what your subjects say or do in front of the camera. So there’s that. You’re also involved in a different part of the process. While there are a handful of shows where you might be employed from pre-production, helping to craft theoretical story arcs before something shoots, you usually come on board after the fact. That means you need to shape what your characters *already* said or did into something dramatic, and it’s why you’ll see a lot of ‘story producers’ or ‘story editors’ in the credits instead of writers. Your story doesn’t come together on the page as with scripted TV, it comes together in the edit suite with your editor (see below).

**Do you work alone or in groups?**

Every show is different; there could be a story room, there could be just you. The common thread is that you will always be working closely with editors in edit suites, which is great because, and I don’t think I’m overstating this, editors are geniuses who should be worshipped for their unnerving magical powers.

**How do the processes of writing reality TV and writing drama inform each other?**

You’re still flexing the same muscles in both genres, you’re looking for stakes, obstacles, character development, cliff-hangers, resolutions. And you still need to be good at receiving notes without crying or throwing things. The key difference in reality story-telling is that your vocabulary is restricted to the footage you already have, so it’s a fantastic, maddening puzzle, like playing Scrabble with only vowels. I do run

---

into the unfortunate perception that reality story-telling is the inferior, tabloid version of ‘real’ writing, but having worked at both, I can attest to how difficult it actually is.

**What the most challenging thing about writing reality TV?**

In terms of process: the constraints of your vocabulary. On one hand, it’s a genre for pragmatists, because you have to deal with what’s in front of you, not what you wish was there; on the other hand, you need to be flexible and creative enough to transform what’s there into meaningful story. In terms of dinner parties: as soon as you mention what you do, people love to tell you how they don’t watch reality TV in a tone that implies you are somehow complicit in the decline of civilization. Because Kardashians.

**What’s the most rewarding thing about writing reality TV?**

The variety and challenge of the work and my awesome co-workers make it worth getting out of bed for. Hanging out with other story editors and editors all day can be like an intense but fun party for introverts, where it’s okay to sit in a dark room and problem solve. And it’s satisfying crafting the kind of entertainment that dinner party guests deny watching, but which is 100% for sure on their PVRs for when they get home and put their slippers on.

**Anonymous**

**Writing reality TV seems odd to some people because they don’t think of it as scripted. How would you most succinctly describe the act of writing reality TV?**

The writer/story editor’s job in reality TV is to shape the story — to what degree varies greatly show to show. For some shows I’ve worked on, the story department actually writes shooting scripts, setting up scenarios for the reality “cast” and even suggesting lines of dialogue.

**How is it different from writing a drama or sitcom?**

You don’t face the same terror of the blank page in reality — you’re always starting with something, be it “real” people (although on some shows you’re creating the on-screen persona) or video from which you construct the story. The starting point is a more limited universe than in drama. The writer’s job in drama and sitcom is almost exclusively in pre-production, whereas in reality it’s mostly in post, working with what the field teams have shot.

“You don’t face the same terror of the blank page in reality — you’re always starting with something, be it “real” people or video from which you construct the story. ”

**Do you work alone or in groups?**

It varies. I have been part of a story team brainstorming episode ideas much in the way one would do in drama or sitcom. In the post-production phase, the story editor’s work is more solitary until the “stringout” is ready for the picture editor, at which point the work is very collaborative. And then, of course, there are notes! Many, many notes!

**How do the processes of writing reality TV and writing drama inform each other?**

The reality writer/story editor’s job is to create drama, so the goal of each genre is the same, as is the tool kit — a firm grasp of story structure, clarity of character and motivation, and an ear for dialogue, which is often constructed in reality shows in what’s known as the Frankenclip, piecing bits of spoken word together to create the desired statement.

**What’s the most challenging thing about writing reality TV?**

While occasionally pickups are shot, mostly you’re stuck with what you’re given. At some point in the note-giving process, somebody is going to ask for something that doesn’t exist in the footage — then it becomes your job to construct it out of what you have. Hence, the Frankenclip!

**What’s the most rewarding thing about writing reality TV?**

Besides a regular pay cheque? Seriously, that’s a big part of it. There are so many of these shows being done in Canada that you can pretty much stay fully employed all year. ■

# JUMPING BETWEEN PAGE AND SCREEN

---

BY MARK DILLON

*Screenwriters have various reasons for writing a book, including artistic freedom and creating Intellectual Property. But they all agree writing screenplays has made them better novelists – and vice versa.*

It is no doubt many a scribe's dream: write a novel, sell the movie rights and pen the screenplay. Elan Mastai is living that dream.

Last October, Mastai struck a rumoured US\$1.25-million deal with Penguin Random House for his debut novel *All Our Wrong Todays*, the tale of a man from a utopian alternate universe who is stranded on Earth but decides to stick around. Weeks later, Paramount and producer Amy Pascal, former chair of Sony Pictures' movie division, scooped up film rights, tasking Mastai with the adaptation.

The project began with a story the Toronto writer was itching to tell, and one he thought best-suited to a novel – a form he was eager to explore.

"Writing movies, there are certain tools you use all the time and certain tools you never use," says Mastai, who won a 2014 WGC Screenwriting Award

for rom-com *The F Word* (also known as *What If* in other countries, including the U.S.A.). "I was interested in stretching some different creative muscles. I didn't know anyone was going to want to publish it."

As different as it might be to write a novel versus a movie, Mastai sees his cinematic skill set as a strong asset.

"I was drawing off a lot of novelistic technique, but the book is very propulsive in the way a screenplay has to be. Screenwriters have a command of present-tense storytelling that exceeds what novelists need to have. As a screenwriter, you reveal character not by what's going on in somebody's head, but by what they do, and that's exciting to read," he explains.

Sometimes, the form a project takes is more fluid.





*Clockwise from top left:  
Elan Mastai, Ian Weir,  
Keith Leckie, and Esta Spalding*

“In a script, you write dialogue, but you don’t have to get as deeply into the characters because at some point, you hand it off to actors who bring their own interpretation.”

Keith Leckie, who penned historical CBC TV movies *The Arrow* (1997) and *Shattered City: The Halifax Explosion* (2003), was subsequently hired by the network to write a couple of miniseries: one about the Black Donnellys, the feuding Irish-immigrant clan in 19th-century Ontario and *Coppermine*, based on the true story of Inuit hunters who murdered a pair of missionaries in 1917.

But a new CBC regime cancelled both. Undeterred, he turned *Coppermine* into a 2010 novel and is writing up the Donnellys in the tentatively titled book *Terrors of the Earth*. Both might make it to the screen after all, as screen rights for the former have been sold and there’s interest in the latter.

Leckie finds novels a great way to challenge his chops. “It’s a much more complex process,” he explains. “You have to get in the characters’ minds. In a script, you write dialogue, but you don’t have to get as deeply into the characters because at some point, you hand it off to actors who bring their own interpretation.”

But, like Mastai, he sees a screenwriter’s sense of tempo as a plus. “My reviews mention that *Coppermine* reads like a screenplay,” he notes. “It has a fast pace that keeps readers compelled, which is what I like, because in screenplays you’re always concerned that at a commercial the viewer will change the channel.”

For those who are screenwriters at heart, certain literary genres are more conducive to their natural style. Such is the case for Los Angeles-based Esta Spalding, who turned some downtime into her first foray into children’s books with *Look Out for the Fitzgerald-Trouts*, due out in May. She is currently writing and executive-producing Showtime drama *Masters of Sex* and adapting Jennifer Egan’s award-winning music-biz novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* into a limited series for Hulu.

*The Fitzgerald-Trouts*, triggered by Spalding’s memories of her childhood in Hawaii, tells the story

of four kids who live alone on a tropical island. She initially wrote it for some evening reading with her daughter — who readily gave her notes. “At some point, I realized it actually was becoming something,” Spalding recalls. It is now projected as a book series, with a follow-up coming next year.

Spalding co-wrote the 2001 adult novel *Mere* with her mother, Linda Spalding, but sees children’s books as a better fit.

“The stuff you have to do in a novel — painting the walls and floors and describing what a character does with their coffee cup — bores me. There’s something about writing for kids where all that gets to be much more elemental,” she says. “I really want to get to a scene’s emotional turn through dialogue. I’m using my training as a screenwriter.”

A novelist is blessed with no concerns about green lights and production budgets, and so there are no restrictions on subject matter.

B.C.-based Ian Weir, playwright and creator of CBC drama *Arctic Air*, has published novels *Daniel O’Thunder* (2010) and *Will Starling* (2014) — both set in 19th century London and containing fantasy elements — and is working on a new novel he describes as “a revisionist Western strongly inflected with southern Gothic.”

In terms of screen work, his predilection for that era has been satisfied only by a couple of unproduced screenplays.

“Novels bring the wonderful freedom of being able to tell any kind of story you feel like telling,” he says. “And for me, those are set in the 19th century, which offers reflections of issues and tropes consuming us today being played out in intriguing ways.”

He believes writing novels has improved his screenwriting.

“People who have worked a long time in TV and film can start falling back on ‘bag-of-tricks’ writing: ‘I’ll do this and that and it will work.’ Sometimes that’s



*Clockwise from top left:  
Edward Kay, Josh Saltzman,  
Susin Nielsen, and Lesley Krueger*



“When you’re beginning a novel, there’s a lot more staring out the window, which is part of the creative process”

due to the pace of the process. But working on a novel is a good reminder of going back to first principles — to go back down into character and find fresh ways to explore character and story,” he says.

### THE BEST PITCH DOCUMENT

Toronto’s Edward Kay set out to develop his project *Verraday* as both a novel and TV series, using each as leverage. The crime thriller tells the story of a troubled forensic psychologist who teams with a homicide detective to catch a serial killer and clear an innocent man.

“I was blowing through my savings and I thought I should get some TV option money to help finance writing the rest of the book,” says Kay, who has balanced TV work such as his cartoon co-creation *Jimmy Two-Shoes* with books including comedic sci-fi kids’ novel *STAR Academy* (2009).

“I took off a month and wrote the *Verraday* pilot,” he says. “It took only a week to get offers, but then it took five months to negotiate a deal. So that strategy didn’t end up helping financially, but it was helpful in terms of focusing the story.” Seven24 Films picked up TV rights, and Crooked Lane subsequently signed a U.S. book deal.

So writing the two versions got deals done. “A book is a huge time investment,” Kay concedes. “But often you go into a pitch meeting trying to get development money with only a one-pager and character outlines, whereas (you have so much more) if you have a completed book.”

Meanwhile, Josh Saltzman is writing prose to not only tell stories in a genre he loves, but to also potentially boost his TV career. The Toronto writer, whose credits range from animated kids’ shows such as *Inspector Gadget* to racy comedy *Call Me Fitz*, is writing a horror short-story collection called *Strange Yarns* and posting instalments to writing-community website Wattpad.

“Often, when I’m trying to get development deals for my show ideas, I get a good response, but [it doesn’t help that] I’ve generally worked on established properties. So, I figured I’d try to find an audience and establish my own property,” he explains.

He says fiction offers “a refreshing change” from TV scripts and their producer and broadcaster notes. For his short stories, the only notes so far are from himself.

“That’s not to say I don’t like getting notes, because often when you’re given certain parameters you have to be really creative to get out. On *Strange Yarns* I don’t have any parameters. It’s nice to jump between those two worlds,” he says.

Fellow Wattpad readers and writers provide feedback, functioning as a sort of virtual writers’ room. “They’ll point out things I might have missed or not even considered, and then I might put those things into my next story or chapter,” Saltzman explains.

Many writers, it seems, like bouncing between the two disciplines. Form is most often dictated by content. Says Toronto-based author Lesley Krueger: “I’m a storyteller and that’s what moves me between movies and novels.”

Krueger is firming up a publishing deal for *Mad Richard*, a work of historical fiction about Victorian painter Richard Dadd, who may have suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and murdered his father.

The Canadian Film Centre mentor script-doctored the videogame adaption *Silent Hill* (2006) and wrote short films *How to Keep Your Day Job* (2012) and *The Spirit Game* (2013), which had healthy festival runs. She is working on *The King of Car Thieves*, an India-Canada copro for The Film Works based on the true story of a boy brought to Canada in a human-trafficking scheme who becomes ... well, it’s in the title.

But for all the potential business and creative advantages of a novel, the more solitary approach can make the writing more challenging.

“When you’re beginning a novel, there’s a lot more staring out the window, which is part of the creative process,” she says. “For scripts, often you’re hired to write based on something else. Of course there are creative decisions to be made about tone and where you start, but you discuss those with producers and directors. In those cases, I don’t do as much staring out the window.”

Susin Nielsen received a Governor General’s Award and the 2013 Canadian Library Association Book of the Year for Children Award for her young adult novel *The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen*, which deals with the aftermath of a school shooting. Oh, and she learned a lot of her licks working on award-winning television like the *Degrassi* franchise and *Heartland*. She enjoys the interaction of an editor and author while recognizing the need for notes on screenplays.

“It’s a bit of an apples and oranges situation. A lot of the notes I’ve gotten on TV projects over the years have been really helpful. But then there are the notes that all TV writers have gotten, that seem to fundamentally want to change what you’ve set out to do, and not always in a good way. Sometimes this can lead to great ‘aha!’ moments that can make an episode even better, but sometimes it ends with a watered down final product. You wind up with a mediocre show, instead of that fresh and exciting and new thing.”

The direction of an editor is more towards the author focusing on their goal, she says.

“In the world of books, at least in my experience, editors are trying to make YOUR vision as strong as it can be. I adore my lead editor here in Canada. She is constantly pushing me to do better, but in a thoughtful, useful way. She isn’t trying to make my book into something else, or make it like a bunch of other recently published books. I’m not being told what to do, ever. At the end of the day I can pick and choose which notes to take, but honestly, I always listen, because she is really freaking good at what she does.”

As with Leckie and Mastai, the screenwriting and novel writing seem to work off one another.

“The screenwriting has really helped my novel writing, big-time. I was writing for television for close to twenty years before I wrote my first young adult novel. All of that experience really helped me with pacing and structure. I knew I had to engage my reader immediately. And dialogue, for sure. I often get compliments on the dialogue in my books, and I absolutely know that’s the television work paying off.”

Nielsen sees pros and cons in both areas:

## **NIELSEN RATINGS: NOVEL WRITING PRO POINTS**

“What I love about writing the YA novels: The creative freedom. I can write whatever I want. It doesn’t mean anyone will want to publish it (I’ve been lucky so far), but I can do whatever I want. In some ways this is also a minus, because the possibilities are infinite and it can be completely overwhelming.”

“I can have moments to just sit and breathe with my characters. Not every single moment has to push the story forward.”

“Not being beholden to network execs who make their Canadian programming a low priority. A lot of the people we screenwriters deal with at networks are very passionate about Canadian television. But the big bosses don’t often share that passion. The reason I wrote my first book, in fact, was because I was sick of waiting and waiting to hear whether or not a show I was doing was going to get renewed. I realized I could either whine and bitch and moan (I’m good at all three), or I could do what I claimed to be good at, which was *write*. I didn’t actually need to be beholden to anyone. Working in my pajamas.”

## **NIELSEN RATINGS: NOVEL WRITING CON POINTS**

“It is all me (until an editor gets involved, but that isn’t until I’ve written — and rewritten and rewritten — a first draft). It’s really hard, on many days. And it can be lonely, working from home day after day. It takes a lot of self discipline.”

## **NIELSEN RATINGS: SCREENWRITING PRO POINTS**

“The collaborative nature of it all. I love working with a bunch of other smart, funny people. It’s such a joy. I haven’t done a lot of that lately and I miss it.”

“The money. The money is much better!”

“The finite-ness of a project. It’s so fun to leap into (often someone else’s) world and write a script that has real parameters. It’s still really hard work, but there are more rules, a more definitive structure.”

“Seeing your work when it actually makes it on air. There is nothing like that feeling. Seeing actors bring your words to life is a thrill like no other.”

## **NIELSEN RATINGS: SCREENWRITING CON POINTS**

Just look at the novel writing pro points, a lot of the negative aspects of screenwriting are listed there. ■

# LETTERKENNY

By Katherine Brodsky



Wayne, Daryl, and the produce stand.





It all started innocently enough with an anonymous Twitter account in which Jared Keeso and a friend would chronicle the day-to-day problems they encountered in their small hometown of Listowel, ON. They got to be pretty funny, so Keeso pondered, “Why not make a webseries out of it?”

And so, the *Letterkenny Problems* webseries was born. It was Keeso’s third attempt at going viral and a niche one at that — or so he thought. But millions of YouTube viewers fell for the hick charms of two friends living in the small town of Letterkenny, a town inspired by Listowel but that could be any small town in North America.

In making the webseries, Keeso always had an end game in mind: to make Letterkenny into a TV show. “If you’re going to invest your time and money, I think there should be an end game involved,” says Keeso. “The goal was always to catch the eye of producers and execs in order to spin it off to a TV show.”

Soon enough, Keeso had joined forces with Toronto-based producers Mark Montefiore and Patrick O’Sullivan of New Metric Media and they



Jared Keeso (left) and Jacob Tierney (right)

began to shop the show around to the big three: Rogers, Bell, and Shaw. Ultimately, it landed at Bell's specialty channel, CraveTV, where it first screened on Feb. 7.

Next, they put together a wish-list of potential writing partners/co-showrunners for Keeso to work with. Jacob Tierney was at the top of that list, so, naturally, the two met for beers in Montreal. They hit it off.

"I liked the webseries a lot. It was really funny, but it wasn't really my wheelhouse, my world," recalls Tierney. "But when I talked to Jared, I realized that we had very similar senses of humour and from that point on I wasn't worried anymore because the show had such a strong voice. It didn't need me to provide the voice. The voice is Jared's. What it needed was for me to provide the structure and making an episode out of that stuff. And I was like 'I can do this for you.'"

It helped that Keeso didn't have to explain the style of the show to Tierney; he was able to show it to him.

They say that God is in the details, and for a show like *Letterkenny*, specificity is key. As someone who had grown up in Listowel for 19 years, working at his dad's lumber mill for eight of them, Keeso has a deep familiarity with the subject matter. "It's something that I don't have to think about too much; it's something that comes out fairly naturally, just because I know this world so well," he says. "We're not farm hicks like on the show; I guess we're a different kind of hick, but the two really are very similar. I don't over-think it too much."

That meant that Tierney could just throw out ideas and rely on Keeso's powerful B.S. meter for what rang true and for what wouldn't work in this world.

So what's behind the popularity of shows like *Corner Gas*, *Trailer Park Boys*, and *Letterkenny*? Why can't we get enough of hick culture? Tierney admits he isn't exactly sure. "I guess maybe we still see ourselves that way in some ways," he says. "It's strange – we're a country that lives in cities and yet we still love our rural comedy."

---

“We’re not farm hicks like on the show; I guess we’re a different kind of hick, but the two really are very similar. I don’t over-think it too much.”

Or, perhaps, it’s because such shows make the audience feel smarter, suggests Keeso: “The approach I take with my characters is if you want to be likeable, just make people think they are smarter than you.

“I think that everybody knows someone like Wayne or Daryl. I think everybody knows someone from *Letterkenny*,” said Keeso. “I think everybody knows someone with *Letterkenny* problems. I think the one thing that’s fairly simple about these guys is that they are so likeable because they let the audience kind of think that they are smarter than them and these problems that they get into ... and I think that’s very refreshing for the audience in that respect.”

The ultimate goal, according to Keeso, isn’t to do anything complex or introduce some major social conscience to the masses. The only goal is to go for laughs on a second-to-second basis in the simplest manner possible, so “that people are able to step into a different world and forget their own for a little while and just have a laugh.”

Making the leap from YouTube to a full-fledged TV series was an unusually smooth and quick process for *Letterkenny*. “If you’re funding your own webseries and putting it up on YouTube, you can do whatever the hell you want,” says Keeso. “You can swear as much as you want.”

But what helped him was having the additional channels from the series to go through all the way from script to screen. “We have some amazing people with massive knowledge and great senses of humour that are working for Bell,” explains Keeso. “What those people bring is just as valuable as what me and Jacob bring to it. And that is nothing short of lucky as hell.”

Speaking of swearing, that was a priority for Keeso. “The F word is very, very important to me and to our scripts. We just had to be able to say what we wanted when we wanted. It was important for us to be able to swear, to keep that edge. As soon as you take the F word out of *Letterkenny*, it looks like you’re

just trying to please the network.” He likens it to the *Wayne’s World* movie, when Noah’s Arcade takes over as a presenter of Wayne and Garth’s show, giving it a corporate feel that sucks out all of the duo’s original charm. “We were scared of that happening. We really weren’t interested in doing the show if we couldn’t make it look and sound exactly how we did it in the webseries and Bell gave us the opportunity to do that.”

For the TV series, Keeso and Tierney were practically given a blank slate to craft their own world, boundaries and tribes. “What YouTube did really well is that it gave you a little taste of the world, a flavour of [the] characters and we just expanded it, gave them things to do,” recalls Tierney. “It’s challenging because it’s not obvious where the show comes from, but, at the same time, that was part of the fun of doing it. We could do a lot of different things in terms of what is the given narrative of *Letterkenny* – that was completely open to us to create.”

The longer format also meant that there needed to be some sort of through line to the season; Tierney insisted there needed to be some sort of problem to be resolved in each episode. But the key wasn’t to stray too far from *Letterkenny*’s original simplicity, while making sure that the comedy was coming from somewhere true. It’s “pretty simple stuff that gets complicated by their problems,” says Tierney. Some episodes are as simple as Daryl having a birthday party.

The most important thing, however, was to maintain the spirit of the webseries. “I want the people who love this to love our show because they are so funny and they speak with such clear voices. I wanted to make sure that the voice stayed clear the whole time.”

When Tierney first saw the webseries, he felt that he hadn’t seen this before and yet he recognized it immediately. “It has that wonderful thing of being specific and universal at the same time, so you get the jokes. And a lot of people can relate to that.”

While thinking they are smarter, of course. ■



# WGC MEMBERS

## Share Your Talents



**New directory: Update your profile. It's easy.**

**Login at [www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca)**

***The New WGC Directory: How Producers Find Writers***

**Questions? Contact Terry Mark [t.mark@wgc.ca](mailto:t.mark@wgc.ca)**



**Writers Guild of Canada**



# Rachel Langer lingers longer

By Greg David

**R**achel Langer took an unusual – though direct – route to writing Canadian television: she approached *Continuum* showrunner Simon Barry and asked him for a job. After attending film school and cutting her teeth on the docu-drama *Crime Stories*, she interviewed showrunners for TV-Eh.com, a website devoted to covering Canadian television. Keen to create her own opportunities in the industry, she asked for a job and landed a writer's assistant role on season three. She's currently a writer on *This Life*, CBC's English-language adaptation of *Nouvelle Adresse*.

**Being the new kid on the block can be tough, especially coming into a TV show like *Continuum* and an established writers' room. What was that like for you?**

I was scared almost every day and had to constantly Google the terms they were using! But they were so kind and gracious and helped me to succeed. They also told me, "For the first week or two, just hang out and listen. Once you feel comfortable, start contributing." That's what I did and it was so much better.

**Your next TV writing gig was on *This Life* alongside Joseph Kay. It was just the two of you in the writers' room, correct? Yes, but the development room before we were green-lighted**

consisted of four different rooms, all with the same people: Michael MacLennan, Shelley Eriksen, Joe and myself. I think we met four different times to develop the season and then once we got the greenlight, Michael had this amazing opportunity to go to *The Fosters*. So he left and Shelley was back on *Continuum* and Joe and I were the only two left. We also had Maxim Morin as the story coordinator and three of us did another five weeks together reshaping. It was sporadic: three weeks here, two weeks there.

**You had already worked on *Continuum* and you were a writer's assistant on *Olympus*. Was it difficult to move to straight drama?**

It's all just character. A series can be stripped away, refreshed and altered, but if you don't have a strong character or an understanding of your complicated characters it's never going to work. *This Life* is a very subtle show and other series I've been on have been less subtle. You're not writing *This Life* with guns blazing. It's stripped down and I think that's what's made this stronger. I hope that when I go back to genre TV, I bring some of what I've learned here back to that.

***This Life* was adapted from Richard Blaimert's *Nouvelle Adresse*. It would have been**

**easy to simply take the scripts already in place from that series and rework them for an English audience. Why did you choose a different approach?**

It was a really interesting hybrid that we chose to do. We took what we felt would translate really, really well and had the freedom to create around that. There were some things that simply didn't translate tonally from French to English, but we felt we were able to capture the heart of it.

**TV writers have multiple projects on the go. Are you constantly coming up with ideas?**

The desire to keep eating is what keeps a lot of people working on multiple things. There is a lot of fear of not getting that next job. But I think for a lot of people, too, is that you're working on a show but you also have shows that you want to make. It's fun to develop and create something that you hope will be your future job.

**What's the biggest challenge as a screenwriter in Canada?**

You don't just get to sit around and be creative. You have to get your face in front of people and let them know you're there and you're working. It can be exhausting but fun because you're meeting great people who are doing fun things. ■

# Unfair Engagers

The guild has declared the following engagers “unfair” for failing to abide by grievance procedures or the decision of a joint standing committee. The WGC’s working rules prohibit members from working with unfair engagers.

**All I Want Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Battered Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Christmas Town Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**FOTP Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Richard Rapkowski*

**Gold Key Productions Corp.**

*Principal: Tim Scott*

**Guardian Films Inc./  
En Garge Films Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**H & S Films**

*Principal: Nicolas Stiliadis*

**Hiding Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**High Seas Rescue Productions Inc.**

*Principal: F. Whitman Trecartin*

**Ice Planet (1) Canada Ltd.**

*Principal: Phillip Jackson*

**Justice Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Kangaroo Court Productions Ltd.**

*Principal: Robin Payne*

**Les Productions les Plus Belles Routes du Monde Inc.**

*Principal: Andre Belanger  
(not affiliated with Spectra Animation Inc.)*

**Lester Beach Entertainment**

*Principal: Jeff Lester*

**Mikisew Keemiwan Productions, Ltd.**

*Principal: Norman Champagne*

**Nikolai Productions**

*Principal: Cindy Lamb*

**Norfolk International Ltd.**

*Principal: William Macadam*

**Numb Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Perfect Stranger Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Prospero Entertainment Group Inc.**

*Principal: John Lambert*

**Richard Lowry Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Richard Lowry*

**She Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Spiritual Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**System Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**T Man Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

**Zolar Productions Inc.**

*Principal: Kirk Shaw*

## Please Help Us Find These Writers!

The CSCS is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for writers

The Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) is holding foreign secondary authors' levies for a number of writers and uncredited productions. As CSCS does not have a current address for these writers or the productions do not have complete credit information we have not been able to forward any monies to the entitled writers. The complete list of writers and productions is available on the CSCS website at:

**[www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot\\_news/index.html](http://www.wgc.ca/cscs/hot_news/index.html)**

If you have any information that would allow us to contact any of these writers or their agents, or if you are a credited writer on the listed production, please contact:

**Marisa King at [m.king@wgc.ca](mailto:m.king@wgc.ca)**

or call (416) 979.7907 ext. 5231 or

1.800.567.9974 ext. 5231.

*Please note that CSCS may require writers to furnish contracts in support of their claim. According to CSCS regulations, if a writer does not claim his or her monies within two years of being posted on our website these monies revert to the operating expenses of CSCS.*





# Highet writes the part, she doesn't just act it

By Cameron Archer

**F**iona Highet's acting career in film, television, and theatre spans three decades, including roles as Sheriff Karen Morgan in *Bitten*, Rayanne Simpson in *Power Play*, and Annie in *Picture Day*. After graduating from the Canadian Film Centre's (CFC) Bell Media Prime Time TV Program in 2014, Highet transitioned to screenwriting; she served as writer and junior story editor for the fourth season of CTV drama *Saving Hope*. Highet co-wrote the show's first holiday episode with *Saving Hope* writer Patrick Tarr.

***Saving Hope* is your first major professional credit as a screenwriter. How did working as an actor in Canadian theatre, film, and television inform your screenwriting work on *Saving Hope*?**

What helps is that I have read literally hundreds of scripts. I know a scene works when I can imagine it being played. I have a strong sense of how good dialogue establishes and supports character and can create flow for your story. I focus on giving the scene a very clear intent

and giving the actor something interesting and truthful to play – a good emotional turn. I try to leave space for the actor to bring his or her life experience to the scene, to give it depth and ground it in reality. I like the “Play it, don't say it” approach as an actor, and try to exercise restraint that way as a writer.

**What are the challenges in transitioning to a screenwriting career after three decades in acting? What sparked the transition, and was it a longstanding goal of yours?**

It was more a longstanding dream than a goal. Asking the world to start thinking of me as a writer when I'd been known as an actor took all my confidence, but I knew it was a “shit or get off the pot” situation for me. I love acting but I felt squandered – I could never work as much as I wanted to, and I was one of the lucky ones, getting lots of great jobs. Writing just for myself was too lonely. I get a lot from bouncing ideas off another person or many people. I couldn't believe it when I got to the CFC and realized a writers' room has so much in common with a

rehearsal hall – the energy, the flow of ideas; I just feel so at home there.

**What sort of contact do you have with the actors on *Saving Hope*? How much influence do you have over how the actors interpret and deliver your scripts?**

I love that on *Saving Hope* we go on set with our episodes. I love watching actors make something really technical, like a surgical scene, intense and emotionally charged. As to influence, I have none. I am on-set for the director in case changes need to be made, to protect the original intention of the script, and to help track how particular moments fit into the entire season, as episodic directors often only know the episode they are working on. The actors and the director negotiate interpretation and delivery between themselves. The great part of being on set over a season is learning the strengths and special skills of certain actors and learning to write to that. On a show that's been running four seasons, I feel the actors influence the writing more than the other way around. ■

# News from WGC Members



**Paul Risacher's** animated feature film *Snowtime!* was shown at the Sundance Film Festival in January. U.S. and Canadian limited theatrical release was slated for February. The film, under its French title *La guerre des tuques 3D*, is the top grossing film in Quebec for 2015.

**Dennis Heaton, Sarah Dodd, Matt MacLennan, Damon Vignale, Jennica Harper, and Julie Puckrin** have completed season four of *Motive* and have all departed to undisclosed locations.

**Robert Cohen** has been nominated for a WGA Award for Best

Documentary Screenplay for his feature doc, *Being Canadian*.

**Tom Mason** is still consulting and writing for a new pre-school series from Guru Studios and Netflix, and writing for the second season of *Footy Pups* for the BBC. He just signed for his 18th *Captain Awesome* book at Simon & Schuster.

The trailer for *Money Monster*, written by Jamie Lindon, **Alan DiFiore** & Jim Kouf, is now online. The film was directed by Jodie Foster and stars George Clooney. It premieres May, 2016.

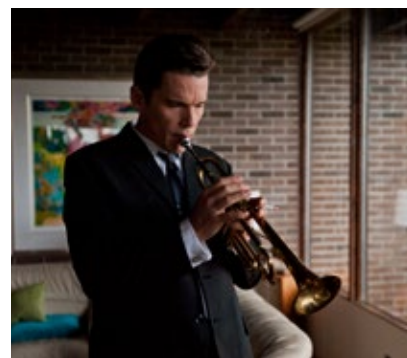
Concluding a successful fourth season as writer/producer on CTV's *Motive*, **Matt MacLennan** has returned to ongoing development of projects in Toronto.

**Louise Bradford's** children's picture book, *Wade's Wiggly Antlers*, will be published by Kids Can Press in 2017. The manuscript was a finalist in the 2014 Writing for Children Competition (Canada).

**Fran Handman's** short play, *Being There*, was produced by the American Renaissance Theatre Company in their *Winter Works* Festival in New York City in

January. As well, *Adding Machine, The Musical*, with lyrics and book by Fran, was given a staged reading during the Midtown International Theatre Festival in NYC.

**Michael Donovan's** teen thriller, *Trick*, is in pre-production with Digital Dimension. Also in the works, a second draft of the animated feature, *Hyde n' Zeke*, for Carpe Diem. That plus the family holiday comedy *Christmas Carol* for Talisman Films.



**Robert Budreau's** feature film, *Born to be Blue*, starring Ethan Hawke as jazz legend Chet Baker, will be released across Canada by eOne in March. The Canada-U.K. co-production was written, directed, and produced by Budreau, along with Jennifer Jonas and Leonard Farlinger of

New Real Films, and Jake Seal of Black Hangar studios.

**Wendy Brotherlin's** first young adult novel, a sci-fi/dystopian adventure titled *Freaks of Nature*, was published by Spencer Hill Press in 2015.

**Simon Johnston's** play, *Rice Rockets*, has been optioned for development by executive producer Leslie Bland of Less Bland Productions. As well, publishing under Simon Choa-Johnston, his novel, *The House of Wives*, will be launched in May, published by Penguin Random House.

**Charles Tidler's** stage adaptation of Jack Hodgins' classic Canadian story, the magic realist tale *Spit Delaney's Island* was premiered in Victoria.

**Douglas Soesbe's** film, *Boulevard*, is airing on Showtime after having had its theatrical release in July, 2014. Robin Williams, in his last onscreen role, gives a nuanced performance as a sixty-year old man coming to grips with long-suppressed homosexuality.

**Donald Martin's** feature film, *The Wanting*, which he is executive producing with Sid Ganis, is set to

shoot in Ontario in June, starring Adam Brody and directed by Yam Laranas. The tone is very much like *Rosemary's Baby*.



**Emma Campbell** worked as executive story editor on the fourth season of Frank Van Keeken's series, *The Next Step*. Emma's original series, *Whacked*, is now in development with Family Channel.

After wrapping the final season of *Da Vinci's Demons* for Starz, **Will Pascoe** is currently developing a mini-series for Playtone.

**Josh Sager & Jerome Simpson** are excited to be on their first leprechaun show *Wishfart*, a new animated comedy from Teletoon and Bejuba Entertainment (second

leprechaun show if you count their punch-up work on *CSI: Tipperary*).

**Ian Carpenter's** movie, *Brace for Impact*, will be out on TMN this year. He's also adapting the book *Indian Ernie* for Shawn Watson and Pier 21, and Incendo is planning to shoot his feature, *Sometimes the Good Kill*, in Montreal this summer.

**James Phillips and Doug Barber's** latest feature, *Run To Me*, starring Claire Forlani, recently finished shooting in Montreal. They have two more movies being shot this spring. James is also developing the action-adventure series, *The Iris for Rogers*.

**Robyn Harding's** feature film, *The Steps*, has been selected as the closing night gala at the Miami Film Festival in March. *The Steps* had its Canadian premiere at TIFF.

**Anthony Grieco** is one of the recent recipients of this past year's Nicholl Fellowship, with a script called *Best Sellers*. (The story: In a last ditch effort to save the boutique publishing house her father has left her, an ambitious young editor goes on a book tour with the bitter, booze-addled author who put the publishing house on the map.) ■



## Welcome

**Tara Armstrong** Victoria BC  
**Sean Alexander** Bath ON  
**Jaylynn Bailey** Pasadena CA  
**Barnet Bain** Toronto ON  
**Sonja Bennett** Vancouver BC  
**Christopher Browne** Los Feliz CA  
**Adam Christie** Halifax NS  
**Dan Dillabough** Toronto ON  
**Philippe Falardeau** Montreal QC  
**Jack D. Ferraiolo** Burbank CA  
**Caitlin D. Fryers** Toronto ON  
**Laura Harbin** Toronto ON  
**Carly Heffernan** Toronto ON  
**Stanley Isaacs** Los Angeles CA  
**Sandra Kasturi** Toronto ON  
**Michael Kessler** Toronto ON  
**Shannon Masters** Toronto ON  
**David Merry** Toronto ON

**Maxim Morin** Toronto ON  
**Kris Pearn** Wallacetown ON  
**Thomas Pepper** Toronto ON  
**Richard Rotter** Toronto ON  
**Eric Sabbag** Montreal QC  
**Daniela Saioni** Toronto ON  
**Vince Shiao** Toronto ON  
**Doug Sinclair** Ottawa ON  
**Pat Smith** Toronto ON  
**Jay Vaidya** Mississauga ON  
**Matthew Venables** Vancouver BC  
**Laura Marie Wayne** Calgary AB  
**Dominic Webber** Montreal QC  
**Priscilla White** Scarborough ON  
**Michael J. Wilson** Malibu CA  
**Sheldon Wilson** Burbank CA  
**Matt Wright** St. John's NL

## Our condolences

**Mark Blandford** Montreal QC  
**David Bolt** Toronto ON  
**Emily Hearn** Toronto ON

**Stanley Jacobson** Willowdale ON  
**George Jonas** Toronto ON

## SERIAL RISK

EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF  
RISK-TAKING IN TV FICTION HERE AND ELSEWHERE  
MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TELEVISION

**MARCH 15, 16 AND 17, 2016**

**STUDIO-THÉÂTRE ALFRED-LALIBERTÉ, UQÀM**

This series of conferences, panel discussions, creative workshops, master classes and networking events will bring together academics, screenwriters and other professionals interested in the production of innovative TV SERIES FROM CANADA, THE U.S., SWEDEN, DENMARK, FRANCE AND BRAZIL.

### REGISTRATION:

**\$75/MEMBERS** OF ASSOCIATIONS AFFILIATED  
WITH THE IAWG (SARTEC, WGC, WGAE, WGA, ETC.)  
**\$125/NON-MEMBERS**

FULL PROGRAM AVAILABLE SOON AT [WWW.SARTEC.QC.CA](http://WWW.SARTEC.QC.CA)

CANADIAN SCREENWRITERS ARE...

WRITING SUCCESS  
ON ALL SCREENS

Writing what  
Canada  
Watches | Writing what  
**SELLS**  
Internationally

*Telling Canadian stories...  
to the World.*



Writers Guild  
of Canada

[www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca)

## Money for Missing Writers

The Writers Guild of Canada is holding monies for the writers listed below. The WGC has been unable to locate the writers and forward the money to them. If you have any information that would help us reach these writers (or their agents or estates), please contact the staff member indicated below. These writers would thank you.

**IPA** - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5270

**Dawn Cumberbatch** — *Top Cops*  
**Elana Devine** — *Student Bodies*  
**Warren Easton** — *Odyssey II*  
**Gerald Fourier** — *Littlest Hobo*  
**John Hollard** — *Littlest Hobo*

**NFB** - contact Aaron Unrau at a.unrau@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5270

**Peter Bierman** — *Twice Upon a Time*  
**Mariette Cooke** — *Happiness Is Loving Your Teacher*  
**Gordon Fisher** — *Wild in the City*  
**Ian Ferguson** — *Canada's Capital* — *Behind the Scenes*  
**Laszlo Gefin** — *Revolution's Orphans*  
**William Maylon** — *Journey of the Blob*  
**Daniel Prouty** — *For Angela*  
**Josef Reeve** — *Canada Vignettes-NFLD*  
**Inger Smith** — *Wood Mountain Poems*  
**Janos Szanyi** — *Revolution's Orphans*  
**Gilles Toupin** — *Cycling: Still the Greatest*  
**Peter Vogler** — *Ernie's Idea*

**CBC-TV** - contact Laurie Channer at l.channer@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5221

**Fred Adams** — *King of Kensington*  
**Peter Churchill** — *20/20: Yorkville Feb 16, 1967*  
**Robert Cooper** — *This Land*  
**Ronald Dunn** — *Wojeck*  
**Donald Ettlinger** — *G.M. Theatre: Billy Budd*  
**Mary Fowler** — *The Man at the Window*  
**Lindsay Galloway** — *Wojeck*  
**Geoffrey Gilbert (estate)** — *Sidestreet*

**Robin Herman** — *King of Kensington*  
**Paul Jodoin** — *Chez Hélène*  
**Arthur Murphy** — *G.M. Theatre: The Death Around Us*  
**Gordon Myers** — *Dr. Zonk and the Zunkins*  
**Irving Gaynor Neiman (estate)** — *The Greatest Man in the World*  
**James Taylor** — *Man Alive*  
**Robert Windsor** — *King of Kensington*  
**Unknown writer** — *The Nature of Things* (Dutch Elm Disease)  
**Unknown writer** — *Hand & Eye* (Glorious Mud)  
**Five unknown writers** — *CAPAC 50th Anniversary Show*

**CBC - RADIO** - Laurie Channer at l.channer@wgc.ca  
1-800-567-9974 ext 5221

**Andrew Allan (estate)** — *Snow Queen, A Sense of Sin*  
**Ernst Behrendt** — *Quirks & Quarks*  
**Tony Bell** — *Nightfall*  
**Janet Bonellie** — *Nightfall*  
**Martin Bronstein** — *Royal Canadian Air Farce*  
**Neil Copeland** — *Between Ourselves: The Titanic*  
**Norman Corwin** — *Theatre of Freedom*  
**Dorothy Davis** — *Sign Unseen*  
**Frank Deaville** — *Woodhouse & Hawkins*  
**Ira Dilworth (estate)** — *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*  
**Ted Ferguson** — *A Perfectly Happy Life*  
**Harry E. Foster (estate)** — *The German World*  
**Howard Griffen** — *The Duel*  
**Hugh Kemp** — *Stage 47: Two Solitudes*  
**Peter Lee** — *Nightfall*  
**David Leicester** — *Nightfall*  
**Joseph MacEastern** — *Much Ado about Ronnie*  
**Art McGregor** — *Woodhouse and Hawkins*  
**Samuel Selvon (estate)** — *Vanishing Point*  
**Henry Sobotka (estate)** — *Johnny Chase*  
**Frederick Spoerly** — *The Cable Car Incident*

# “Oh, Great Aunt of Great Scribe”

Not by Harrington Gordonson

*Our Resident Éminence Grise, Harrington Gordonson, is in the midst of renovating his magnificent abode, having hired the talented Mike Holmes to knock down a wall or two and notion out a nook. Between that and rescuing stray South of 60 Polar Bears, his mittens are full. But Canadian Screenwriter is proud to present in his stead the Great Aunt of the Great Gordonson. Lavinia's insights into her nephew's career and the industry itself are nothing short of unusual. Like all aging relatives, she speaks her truths. Deal with it.*

I am Lavinia Pleasance Gordonson, Harrington's Great Aunt on his father's side, the side with the money. My credentials? I have a Ph.D. from Brown University in social science and I speak eight foreign languages. Canadian included.

First, a word on my dear Great Nephew's very interesting career, as he is far too shy to shine his light. He is a family favourite, but to read him here, you would never know of his passionate love of UFC fighting, breeding show Bassets, and the Oxford comma. Corrected.

I understand dear H. writes scripts for Canadian Television. This is strange. We've heard tell in the lower 48 that there is a dearth of "Golden Age TV" in the far north. We love Gold in our Family and are most disappointed Harrington has not procured any. Your Beloved National Newspaper TV Scribbler insisted we need Golden Age TV. Harrington, my dear, you do need to get to work on THE GOLD. But upon further perusal, said Scribbler seems to have a tin ear when it comes to Gold himself.

O Canada, Canada, always the resource base, pray tell, how is it possible your man in the Paper *Rumplestiltskins* about missing gold when all around, valuable diamonds in the rough go unexploited and unmined? It seems you've learned nothing from your disastrous flirtation with those filthy tar sands. Your TV Industry seems focused on striking TV Muck, leaving your own diamonds in the ground in favor

of cubic circonia, quartz and fools' gold from the Californias. I would never think of landing our family jet, yet it seems here north of the 49th, no one ever listens to to your writing experts about what it takes to make a Golden TV Show. (Expert writers want to deliver the show they created, not someone's idea of the show. Having tried to do due diligence, it seems that none of your muck-drillers can offer a particularly gifted prospectus.) I wouldn't run a mine that way. You'll never strike gold if you only sift a vein that went dry two years ago. (Even if the steak at the Beverly Hilton is spectacular.)

I'm a woman of a certain age with bad eyes and irritable nethers, but even I can see that your Golden Leaders might be better off investing in writers with solid writing credits from the country that provides them with generous tax credits. Now, as a proud Bostonian, of course I agree that Americans are always right. But as my mad desperate crush Bernie Sanders might say, "the revolution will not be televised on Shomi or CraveTV, if all you've got is U.S. network retreads." (Look it up, he said it in Worcester.) I also believe my Great-Nephew and his like should be able to create and produce their own vision of Canadian Gold. It bloody worked in Dawson City now, didn't it? (That would make an excellent TV series, by the way. I'm sure some American company will figure that out sooner or later. Just don't mention the Yukon.)

Canadians are in jeopardy — and it isn't just in the oil fields. Therefore as my last piece of advice on this issue, I would counsel all makers of Canadian TV to continue to make shows in Canada with Canadian tax credits and call the setting America. Believe me, we don't recognize the place anymore ourselves. Surely you can slip a shot of Calgary or Toronto or Vancouver by us. Most of us can't find Montana on a map.

I should also mention two important languages which I have mastered in my travels. Master them and they shall help you.

The language of **Telefilmilologica** was invented so as to market the world. It mattered not that there was nothing yet to market. Telefilmilologica presupposes that marketing precedes that which is to be marketed. Content will come. Or it will not. And if it does not, simply market all the old stuff.

**CMFknowitallian:** This is an entirely unique language and you mustn't take liberties as the CMF-knowitallian grammarians will take extreme offence. The only way to learn this language is to closely study all handbooks, charts, graphs and the like, and attend every one of their many, many meetings. Even those one is not invited to. This language is entirely dependent on its idiosyncracies, as "jargon," or, to the layperson "flat-out made-up-words."

Keep reaching for the gold, my poor dears. At least when you were on the fur standard it kept you warm at night. ■



## March

- 1** — *Deadline* — Independent Production Fund, Webseries [ipf.ca](http://ipf.ca)  
**1** — *Deadline* — Cogeco Fund, Production [cogecofund.ca](http://cogecofund.ca)  
**3-6** — Women Making Waves Conference [wift-at.com](http://wift-at.com)  
**7-13** — Canadian Screen Week [academy.ca](http://academy.ca)  
**13** — Canadian Screen Awards Broadcast Gala, CBC [academy.ca](http://academy.ca)  
**18-20** — Vancouver Web Fest [vancouverwebfest.com](http://vancouverwebfest.com)  
**22** — Writers Talking TV, TIFF Bell Lightbox [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)

## April

- 20** — National Canadian Film Day [canadianfilmday.ca](http://canadianfilmday.ca)  
**22-24** — Toronto Animation Arts Festival International [taafi.com](http://taafi.com)  
**28-May 8** — Hot Docs [hotdocs.ca](http://hotdocs.ca)

## May

- 2** — WGC Screenwriting Awards [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)  
**TBA** — TO WebFest [towebfest.com](http://towebfest.com)  
**25** — Writers Talking TV, TIFF Bell Lightbox [wgc.ca](http://wgc.ca)  
**26-June 5** — Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival [insideout.ca](http://insideout.ca)

## June

- 12-15** — Banff World Media Festival [banffmediafestival.com](http://banffmediafestival.com)



MERIDIAN ARTISTS

### Toronto

349 Carlaw Ave., Suite 303  
 Toronto, ON M4M 2T1  
 416-961-2777

### Los Angeles

1664 Greenfield Ave.  
 Los Angeles, CA 90025  
 310-479-2777





Celebrating  
Canada's  
Screenwriters

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual*

# WGC Screenwriting Awards

## The Writers Guild of Canada congratulates the 2016 finalists

### Children

*Numb Chucks*, Season 2 "Witless to the Prosecution"

Written by **Evan Thaler Hickey**

*Odd Squad*, Season 1 "Puppet Show"

Written by **Charles Johnston**

*Pirate Express*, Season 1 "Fountain of Misspent Youth"

Written by **David Elver**

### Documentary

*Deluged by Data*

Written by **Josh Freed**

*Ninth Floor*

Written by **Mina Shum**

### Feature Films

*A Christmas Horror Story*

Written by **James Kee** and **Sarah Larsen** and **Doug Taylor** and  
**Pascal Trottier**

*End of Days, Inc.*

Written by **Christina Ray**

*The Saver*

Written by **Wiebke von Carolsfeld**

### MOW & Miniseries

*The Book of Negroes: Episode 1*

Story by **Lawrence Hill**, Teleplay by **Clement Virgo**

*The Gourmet Detective*

Written by **Becky Southwell** & **Dylan Neal**

*Kept Woman*

Written by **Doug Barber** & **James Phillips**

### Shorts & Webseries

*Bob! The Slob*

Written by **James Nadler**

*Goldfish*

Written by **Michael Konyves**

### TV COMEDY

*Mr. D*, Season 4 "President Jimmy"

Written by **Anita Kapila**

*Mr. D*, Season 4 "Short Stocked"

Written by **Marvin Kaye**

*Schitt's Creek*, Season 1 "The Cabin"

Written by **Amanda Walsh**

### TV Drama

*19-2*, Season 2 "Orphans"

Written by **Jesse McKeown**

*19-2*, Season 2 "Property Line"

Written by **Nikolijne Troubetzkoy**

*19-2*, Season 2 "School"

Adapted by **Bruce M. Smith**

*Orphan Black*, Season 3 "Newer Elements of Our Defense"

Written by **Russ Cochrane**

*X Company*, Season 1 "Into the Fire"

Written by **Mark Ellis** & **Stephanie Morgenstern**

### Tweens & Teens

*Some Assembly Required*, Season 2 "Rocket with a Pocket"

Written by **Jennica Harper**

*Some Assembly Required*, Season 2 "Snappo"

Written by **Cole Bastedo** & **Jennifer Siddle**

*The Stanley Dynamic*, Season 1 "The Stanley Grandpa"

Written by **Alice Prodanou**



Writers Guild of Canada



The 20<sup>th</sup> annual WGC Screenwriting Awards,  
hosted by **Ryan Belleville**

Winners announced at awards gala, **Monday, May 2, 2016**

Ticket information coming soon: [www.wgc.ca](http://www.wgc.ca)