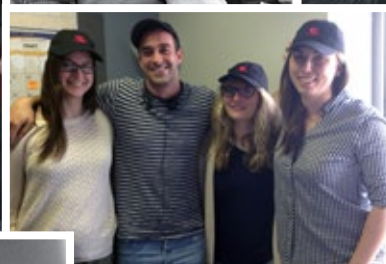
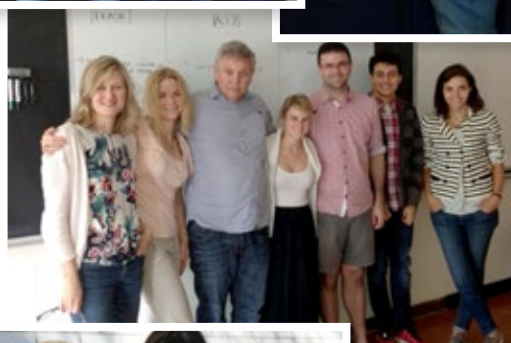


THE FIRST 25 YEARS

A Brief Oral History of the Writers Guild of Canada

Interviews Conducted and Compiled
By Steve Lucas

The Writers Guild of Canada was created in 1991 when writers made the bold decision to break away from ACTRA, the performer's organization, and become a self-sufficient Guild of independently contracted writers. By doing so, writers took control of their own affairs and were able to pursue the issues that mattered most to them. But it was no easy feat: the fledgling WGC had almost no money, very few employees, and literally no office furniture. What it did have was dedicated members and staff who, over the past 25 years, have shaped the WGC into the strong, forward-thinking organization that it is today. This is the WGC's story, as told by some of the members and staff who were there.







PROLOGUE

Peter Mohan: I remember Rob Forsyth on set one day telling me about an American producer who told him, “Boy, I love working in Canada. You don’t have to pay the writers!”

Chuck Lazer: It’s not that there wasn’t a Guild back in the 1980s; there was, there was even a Guild before that. It’s that the Guild was part of ACTRA then and there were less than 1,000 writers in a Guild of 8-9,000 actors. Now I love actors and I’ve worked with actors but I don’t want actors running my life.

Sarah Dearing: Maureen [Parker] and I were in the office after hours having drinks with the senior staff person at ACTRA. He was talking about negotiations and how one of his performer members had dramatically said they were entitled to all sorts of raises because actors save lives in the work that they do. And this staff person then dramatically said, “So the next time I have a heart attack and I’m lying in the street, I’m going to say,

‘Call for an actor!’” And that epitomized why we needed to separate from the performers because that was the level of dialogue at the negotiating table.

Fred Yackman: Everything came to a head at the ACTRA AGM in 1990. Our concerns were not the actors’ concerns and why should they be? We wanted more control over our affairs and our ideas didn’t go over very well. Basically they shouted us down.

Andrew Wreggitt: Some of the younger folks think the Guild is this big bad organizing thing they have to give money to and they don’t get a choice in it and they just have to do this stuff. They don’t quite understand that when you hear how the Guild got started way back, it was pretty rock n’ roll, you know? We’re going to do *what*? You want me to sign up for *that*? But it happened because people put themselves out there and believed in it and took a chance. It’s no different now. The issues are still big. They’re still trying to kill us out there.

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

- **Peter Mohan** is a Toronto-based showrunner and national forum delegate from 2004-08; 1998-99.
- The late **Rob Forsyth** was a Toronto-based screenwriter.
- **Chuck Lazer** is a Vancouver-based screenwriter and Pacific region councillor from 2004-12.
- **Sarah Dearing** has been a WGC staff member (full time and part time) since 1991.
- **Maureen Parker** is Executive Director of the WGC.
- **Fred Yackman** is a documentary screenwriter and Western region councillor from 1992-2006.
- **Andrew Wreggitt** is the Vice-President of the WGC and Western region councillor since 2007.
- **Bill Williams** is former Vice-President of the WGC (1991; 1994-98).
- **Jack Gray** served as WGC President from 1991-93.
- The late **Linda Zwicker** served as Central region councillor from 1991-93.
- The late **Tony Foster** served as a WGC councillor from 1991-94.
- **David Barlow** is a Toronto-based screenwriter and member of the IPA bargaining committee from 1995-2008.
- **Sharon Corder** is a Toronto-based writer/producer.
- **Jack Blum** is a Toronto-based writer/producer.
- **Briane Nasimok** is a Toronto-based screenwriter.
- **Pete White** was President of the WGC from 1995-2003 and Vice-President from 1992-94.
- The late **Phil Savath** was a member of the 2000-02 IPA bargaining committee.
- **Hart Hanson** is a television writer and producer.
- **Rick Drew** is a Vancouver-based screenwriter.
- The late **Michael Mercer** served as a WGC councillor in 1991.
- **Susin Nielsen** is a Vancouver-based screenwriter and Pacific region national forum delegate from 2000-05, 2012-15.
- **Denis McGrath** is a Central region councillor and member of the 2012-14 and 2015-17 IPA bargaining committees.
- **Leila Basen** is a Montreal-based screenwriter and Quebec region councillor from 2004-08.
- **Cal Coons** is a screenwriter/director and national forum delegate from 2004-08; 2011-12.
- **Mark Farrell** is a Halifax-based showrunner and member of the 2012-14 IPA bargaining committee.
- **Simon Racioppa** is a Toronto-based animation writer, national forum delegate, and member of the IPA bargaining committee since 2010.
- **Bruce Smith** is a Montreal-based showrunner, national forum delegate, and member of the 2006-08; 2012-14 and 2015-17 IPA bargaining committees.
- **Mark Ellis** is a showrunner, and Central region councillor since 2010.
- **Stephanie Morgenstern** is a showrunner.
- **Deanna Cadette** is the director of the Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters program.
- **Lienne Sawatsky** is a Montreal-based animation writer, national forum delegate, and member of the 2012-14 IPA bargaining committee.
- **Jill Golick** is the President of the WGC and a Central region councillor since 1994.
- **Dennis Heaton** is a Vancouver-based showrunner, and a Pacific region councillor since 2012.
- **Konrad von Finckenstein** is former chairman of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) from 2007-2012.
- **Laurie Channer** is Director of industrial relations for the WGC.

THE EARLY YEARS (1991-1999)



Clockwise from top-left: Sam Marinucci; WGC Top Ten Awards party, circa 2001; Margaret Hollingsworth with Top Ten Award; WGC newsletter coverage of Top Ten Awards, 1998

Bill Williams: The groundwork for our dispute with ACTRA had actually been laid two years earlier, at the 1988 AGM. We proposed changing our name from the ACTRA Writers Guild to the Writer's Guild of Canada. It had worked for the Writers Guild of America (East and West) and the Writers Guild of Great Britain, so why not for us? But ACTRA took it as a slap in the face and emphatically rejected the proposal. That wasn't a very smart move.

Fred Yackman: In February of 1991 at my first meeting as a national councillor we — Jack Gray, Linda Zwicker, Bill Williams, Tony Foster and myself — were sitting around the table and we said, well, it's time to be the Writer's Guild of Canada and time to say goodbye to ACTRA and we said let's vote on it and that was it.

Chuck Lazer: It's like when I moved out of my parents' house when I was 16. To school. But it was time for me to get out of the house. I see us getting

away from ACTRA as the same thing. We — some of us, anyway — were ready to go live on a park bench if we had to.

David Barlow: I was directing a half-hour pilot written by Sharon Corder and Jack Blum for YTV. We were in a forest near Bracebridge, Ontario. Chuck Lazer and Briane Nasimok came walking through the trees. We were just about to break for lunch. Chuck has always had exquisite timing. At lunch, he and Briane revealed that they and some of their colleagues believed it was time for Canadian screenwriters to form an independent Guild. He and Briane were signing people up. I asked what the freight was. Chuck said, "It depends. Since you're working, it'll be a hundred dollars." I wrote a cheque. Chuck gave me a small lapel button. Black with white letters — W.G.C. Best one hundred dollars I've ever spent.

Chuck Lazer: The working writers were tremendously generous. All the big earners in the

THE EARLY YEARS (continued)



*Clockwise from above: Maureen Parker; Pete White;
David Barlow (left), Chuck Lazer (right)*



Guild agreed to a two per cent dues increase on their earnings with no cap and the rest of the membership followed. That's what made the whole thing possible.

Fred Yackman: There were three things we focused on: One, establishing a Guild that was for working writers and modernizing it; Two, letting our members know we were doing that; and three, negotiating a deal that would ensure we could keep our Fraternal Benefits. We had to accomplish all three things together. Once we did all that, we could hold a referendum.

Bill Williams: We were pitching radical change, which tends to make people nervous. We knew we had to help our members understand the issues and keep them up to speed on developments. Today there's an app for that, but there was no Facebook in those days. So we opted for a newsletter, a new logo and new stationery. We hired a young design firm and said, "Here's the job: make us look as solid and stable as a life insurance company."

Chuck Lazer: How did we structure things? We talked. And talked. There were a lot of meetings. We would meet every six weeks at the Wedgewood Hotel in Vancouver. Pete White would come to town. Phil Savath, Hart Hanson, Rick Drew, Michael Mercer.

Bill Williams: We were determined not to replicate the structural disadvantages of ACTRA. Branches were expensive and the source of a lot of political shenanigans. So we opted for one unified organization that operated nationally.

Fred Yackman: We had to reassure our membership that we were a phone call away. Give us a call and we will address your concerns.

Bill Williams: We introduced the concept of forums, one at the national level, and as many local forums as members felt the need for. The idea was to provide members with representation — and a channel to contribute to and influence Guild policy.

Fred Yackman: We expanded the council from five members to seven, a seat in B.C. and another seat in Quebec. This again was partially to address the fact we were getting rid of the branches.

Sarah Dearing: Why couldn't we make payroll? Why didn't we have office furniture? There was no money. So we focused on enforcing the agreement and grieving when we had to. That was a big change for us. Slowly the money trickled in.

Fred Yackman: The final step in leaving was to negotiate a deal with ACTRA and most importantly Fraternal. That was Bill Williams busting his ass for however long it took. We knew our membership would not come with us without a deal with Fraternal.

Bill Williams: In 1995 we finally hammered out a separation deal with ACTRA and a deal to remain in Fraternal. Now the stage was set for the referendum to leave ACTRA.

Fred Yackman: We had to make sure 33 percent of our members voted and then we had to have 50 percent plus one vote to approve it. Jack Blum took the lead in getting out the vote and we did it.

Chuck Lazer: Why was new leadership needed at the Guild? There was a feeling that the existing leadership was too tied to the past and not able to look to the future.

Susin Nielsen: The person who really deserves a shout out in this article — and she'll hate it — is Maureen. Because I don't know how she has been able to tolerate her job for all the years she's been doing it. She loves working with writers — that's the part that gives her pleasure. But sitting around with the bureaucrats in Ottawa and being across the table from the odd misogynistic pig producer saying horrible things to her, this cannot be a fun part of the job — but she sticks it out and she fights the good fight and she surrounds herself with good people.

Chuck Lazer: The 1994-96 negotiation was our first negotiation as a separate entity. It was long but it was good.

David Barlow: WGC president Pete White and executive director Maureen Parker had modest ambitions for this round of bargaining. Among other things: a total revamp of the structure of the written agreement, a raise in rates, and the expansion of the WGC's jurisdiction to include

story editors. It was going to be a long campaign. In one of the early sessions a particularly condescending and intransigent lawyer on the producers' team articulated why they would not agree to one of the Guild's key proposals and used a ten-dollar word to cap his comments. Guild member Phil Savath gave a succinct counter and concluded by pointing out that the ten-dollar word was, in fact, not an actual word. "And that's why producers need writers," Phil said. Both sides of the table laughed. Except for the lawyer. After that day, he never returned to the bargaining table.

Chuck Lazer: What was great about it was that we had a seat at the table. We could finally have those kinds of conversations. And we were lucky — or maybe we were just very good — in that David Barlow led our bargaining team at that time. He was well known and respected by the producers because he had actually produced series himself. His demeanor was (and still is) quiet, soft-spoken and non-threatening. Until provoked. And he's smart. He could summarize the producers' arguments and make our response to them without going off the deep end. Until they said something so disrespectful even David got angry. David Barlow angry is a righteous, beautiful sight.

Peter Mohan: I'm proud to have been part of the committee that put together the first awards and shaped that notion of an anti-award award show that was not about glitz and hype but about having a good time and celebrating writers. We told everybody that giving the awards away in the first year by putting the envelopes on a wheel with balloons and having people throw darts at them was to replicate the way Telefilm funds projects, you know, the scientific method Telefilm uses.

Denis McGrath: I think establishing the Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) in 1998 was one of the most forward-thinking things we have ever done. Much of Europe has a completely different system where writers are paid levies for secondary uses. The Guild negotiated and continues to negotiate agreements with those European countries to collect these monies. Our shows sell there but without the CSCS that secondary use money would stay in Europe. Maybe the time will come when writer compensation here follows a model more like the European or South American one and we'll have been way out in front of it. That's the strategic part. For the members, it's a cheque that comes out of nowhere. Who doesn't dream of that?

THE MIDDLE YEARS (2000-2009)



Clockwise from left: Jill Golick; (left to right) Showrunners Mark Ellis, Stephanie Morgenstern, Peter Mohan, and Tassie Cameron; Continuum writers' room; In the writers' room; Corner Gas writers' room

Leila Basen: Early on in my writing career, I was sitting with a [famous producer] in some Hungarian dive on Mountain Street in Montreal. He told me if he could get up early in the morning, he could be a director and if he had more time, he could be a writer. Producers actually think that.

Cal Coons: Gaining jurisdiction over story editors? The most obvious impact was it meant we could be of some help righting some wrongs. A group of writers could now be assembled, not producers but writers, which meant stories were no longer the act of a single writer but a group. If a script ran into troubles, everybody could pitch in and help. I always think of it as a school where no student gets left behind. More symbolically it cemented the idea that the writers' department could guide the script toward the production. The writers were going to be in charge of the script.

Andrew Wreggitt: The fight for animation really started in 1998. It continues to this day. Why have we fought so hard for animation? What were the biggest obstacles? Well, the producers were the biggest obstacles because they didn't want to do it for reasons that are pretty obvious but if we paid attention to that, they wouldn't pay us for anything. They'd just say, why don't you write a bunch of stuff and if we make any money, we'll give it to you — some of it, anyway.

Cal Coons: I think the other obstacles to getting animation covered were the animation writers themselves — how do you unite them? You had pockets of individuals wanting to write but who were afraid that if they made any noise, their employers would come down on them.

Andrew Wreggitt: The reason we finally got animation covered is the membership stood up and barked. They asked us, why don't we have an agreement? We said, well, it's really hard to get one with Canadian producers because they won't even talk about it. And the members barked again and we said, well, okay, you guys are passionate, are you willing to work on this with us? And some of them said, yes, and we went to work on it and in the end we got it. To me what was important was that it showed the membership that when you really want something, well, the Guild is here to give you what you need — but if we don't hear you and if we don't see you volunteering to participate in what we're doing on your behalf, then you're not necessarily going to get what you want. This is a participatory democracy here.

Cal Coons: Mobilizing the membership before social media? When you were a forum delegate in those days, you would have a party and invite all the



writers in your region and you'd ask them to tell you what they thought the issues were. It was like word of mouth, really. You'd talk to an individual who'd talk to an individual; it just sort of slowly spread. Luring writers with drinks is pretty simple stuff.

Sarah Dearing: Early on there were really only a few people who came to those sad Christmas parties. So Maureen put a great deal of effort into trying to convince writers to take ownership and having more interesting Christmas parties and pulling more people in.

Mark Farrell: The Writers Guild having the Showrunner Award was important. I mean, it's part of pop culture now. People, even line producers, want to be called showrunners and I think it's great the Guild has piggybacked on that momentum and is helping people understand what a showrunner is and does.

Simon Racioppa: The Guild has played a massive role in promoting the idea of the showrunner here in the past 10 years. TV is a writer's medium. In the States, they've known that for years. Here it has been a producer's medium. I think that's starting to change.

Bruce Smith: You know, television is a machine that runs on paper. If you can personally fix the paper,

you can correct the machine as it runs. So there's a good business reason why writing showrunners became the sort of de facto model.

Denis McGrath: The big first step was the establishment of the Showrunner Award at the WGC Awards. I know there are some people who have been showrunners since the 1990s who say this is what I negotiated and I always had this degree of power and influence on the show but for people like me it was a lot more rare — we had the thing where you had lots of responsibility and no ability to effect change. I think the establishment of that award really announced that we need to be part of what's happened in television and what's made television great certainly in the U.S. system, which is the empowerment of the writer-producer.

Bruce Smith: I work largely in the Quebec model on this show, meaning minimal resources for the writing room, but I have real creative freedom and control over *19-2* in a lot of ways that used to be super rare but as people like Mark Ellis and Stephanie Morgenstern have real success and move on is becoming a lot more common. As flawed as the world is and the limits of working in Canada are, my sense is that it's never been better than it has been in the last 10 years. Who knows what the next 10 years will be like?

THE LATER YEARS (2010-present)



*From left: WGC IPA Bargaining Committee, 2012-2014;
Bell Media Diverse Screenwriters, Eastern Canada, 2012-2013*

Susin Nielsen: I remember, before joining the Guild, sitting in a room with three producers. Door closed. They told me the good news: They'd chosen me to write the treatment and draft for a movie project. They then slid the contract across the table. I read it. The fee: \$750. Even though I was young and naive, my heart sank. They slid a pen across the table. There was a pause. They all knew what they were doing was rather despicable. But I picked up the pen. And I signed. And I remember thinking, "I will never be taken advantage of like this again." Shortly afterward I joined the Guild.

Cal Coons: Positioning the role of the screenwriter in our lobbying and policy work? I guess we did two things. First, we argued that the writer was responsible for the idea and if there was no idea, there would be no show. The other thing we did was we usually presented the screenwriter as levelheaded.

Andrew Wreggitt: It's actually really simple: Maureen Parker and the staff are really organized. So that when the writers show up at the CRTC, everybody knows there's no crying or whining or histrionics. It's all hard facts and well-researched material and it's a reasonable argument. Not everybody who shows up at the CRTC is reasonable or has done their homework and we always do our homework. It's about being professional and ready to walk into that place.

Cal Coons: It makes you very nervous. You go into a small, low-ceilinged room and these seven people or whatever are waiting and sometimes you wonder, are they actually awake? Is this person friendly or hostile? Is this person a political appointee with an agenda? Does this person know what they're doing or are they a specialist in an area that's not creative?

Andrew Wreggitt: It's a bit like the chickens asking for a meeting with Colonel Sanders. When you go in there, it's, like, writers? That's what we have for breakfast here. That's why the Guild has to be smarter than everybody else who turns up there. Otherwise the Commission would just devour us.

Cal Coons: I don't remember a lot of laughs in the CRTC sessions, to be honest with you. What I liked was the amount of bonding, the camaraderie afterward. The best times were when you were having dinner or a cocktail and trying to figure out what your next move was going to be. We laughed a lot then.

Andrew Wreggitt: There was one time we were there for the CBC license hearings and it happened to be the night the Stampeders were in the Grey Cup. So I go to this place in Ottawa that has a million screens and a big screen and there's this

guy sitting beside me and he's kind of loud and all of a sudden the referee calls a penalty and this guy doesn't like it and he says, "Fuckin' CBC!" And I say, "well, a) it's TSN and b) the network doesn't actually call the penalties in football." Fuckin' CBC, which just had me on the floor. The next day I worked it into our address to the commission. It was not quite as funny to them as it was to me. I thought it was hilarious.

Mark Farrell: The Diverse Screenwriters Workshop? I've participated twice and I hope that I've helped. I don't know what more the Guild can do — it's doing it. I mean, I laugh all the time — every time I've been told to write a diverse character by a network or a production company exec, every single person who has told me that in the last 20 years has been white. So hats off to the Writers Guild for trying. You won't see the results of this for five to 10 years but I think it's a great program. CBC picked it up? I didn't know that, that's great. Deanna Cadette is great, she's fantastic.

Simon Racioppa: Younger writers tend to be more excited, less jaded. They want to do stuff and make TV. As jobs go, it's a pretty good one. Which means you often accept issues, deals, problems you probably shouldn't accept.

Lienne Sawatsky: I've been writing for 15 years. My mother is a journalist, editor and journalism professor and has always been very active in unions, so I was basically brought up believing in them. Maureen cornered me at a meeting before the 2012 negotiations and said, "You. You are going to be on this committee, you have no choice." And I said, but, but — and she said, "No, we need you, you're on the committee."

Simon Racioppa: I've been a member since 2002. I'm proudest of the bargaining I've done. Everything starts with us. For a long time, it was just another job. You hire the writer the same way you hire a grip but we are the creators. We're not replaceable. We have unique voices. Don't you want that? Don't you want writers with strong unique voices?

Lienne Sawatsky: In a nutshell the issue was that animation writer rates had actually been going down for the past decade. We decided to stop that, to establish a basement. We needed to start somewhere, we needed to set a number down and we did. As you're doing it, you're thinking, "Am I ever going to get hired again?" But being guided by Jill Golick and Maureen, who are literally union

rock stars, and bargaining alongside established, articulate and passionate writers like Bruce Smith, Mark Ellis, Mark Farrell, Denis McGrath and Dennis Heaton was inspiring and reassuring.

Simon Racioppa: Bruce Smith had written a show about Sir John A. MacDonald. I remember seeing Bruce transform into Sir John A. and make some of the most eloquent and wonderful arguments for our side in bargaining, usually leaving the room silent because the producers had no possible response, because there wasn't one. We were making a small number of very fair requests. Bruce left them with no option other than to realize they had no ground to stand on.

Bruce Smith: It's very touching to hear that. I'm glad people feel I had an impact. It's hard for me to comment. What happens in negotiation I rarely talk about outside negotiation but I have done a fair bit of it for the Guild now. I find it really important, it's maybe the most important thing as a member I feel I can do for the Guild because it's tricky. It's a pretty thankless job.

Mark Farrell: The animation bargaining in 2012? Oh, yeah. I sat in on that. Maureen was great, Jill was great. I think the agreement should be lauded more. I thought the other showrunners who came in from outside animation — people like Bruce Smith, he does these things all the time, he's a great guy — were great but that was a tough one.

Lienne Sawatsky: I was kind of in awe of how dedicated everyone was to the cause — how members were willing to put their own concerns aside to fight for minimums in animation — and it really reinforced for me how important our union is and how effective it can be when we all dig our heels in.

Denis McGrath: The community of writers? That's a big thing. I struggle with it. When I first came in and starting getting jobs, one of the things that prompted me to get involved with the WGC was wondering, where is this community of writers? Part of what we came up with just recently, which is modeled on something the WGA does, is the new writer outreach. When somebody becomes a new member now, we match them up with an established WGC member who is somebody they can call. The senior members take them out for coffee, they explain things like, here's your I & R, here's how your RRSP works. Both sides report back that they find that a rewarding experience.

Bruce Smith: Another thing that's really unique is the real collegiality and support, the sort of well-wishing that goes on among the senior Canadian talent I've worked with, particularly writers and showrunners. I find that culture right up to the senior people very supportive and encouraging. One does have a sense like I do that a show like *Orphan Black* is good for everybody. I love that part of the culture.

Mark Farrell: My favourite thing is talking to other writers who have been through similar things to me. For me, I never get to do that. Things like the national forum and the Writers Guild Awards and the Diverse Screenwriters program — they give me a chance to do that and it's fantastic. I also think the outreach the Guild does is important. Since I joined in [1995], it's improved exponentially.

Susin Nielsen: My husband — he's an engineer, right, he teaches up at UBC — all through my life when I get to go somewhere for Guild business, he will always say, "You're so lucky. You're actually looking forward to going on these trips. You actually know you're going to have fun. When I go off to an engineering conference, fun is not the word that comes to mind." I do think that's so true. There's something about bringing a group of writers together — I never laugh as hard as I laugh with that group of people and I also never drink as much as I do when I'm with that group of people.

Simon Racioppa: CanCon going forward? I see it as two things. On the political side, there has to be the will to compete with the U.S., which has 10 times our population and way more money. Because our cultures overlap, it's like softwood lumber or cars. Sometimes we need a little help to level the playing field. Would you want your kids to grow up watching only U.S. TV? Do you only want to watch U.S. media, news, drama, and films yourself? The other side is the craft side, creating a community where young people can go and practise their craft, contribute to the culture and make a show.

Denis McGrath: I really think the answer is writer-centered development. You look at the Scandinavian shows that are doing so well, they've all got this great specificity of time and tone and place and quality. They got there because there was a distinct change in the culture there. Everybody that was part of the system — the networks, the commissioning editors, the production companies — all said if we're going to take a shot at this, we need to support the writers and their vision. When you get notes there, it's all basically the same note: What are you trying to

do? How far are you going to go? What is this show about? Does it say anything essential about the human condition? And once we decide that this is where we're going, how can we help you get there? Rather than here's what you must do for a U.S. sale. When you support the creatives, you're rewarded with quality shows that sell all over the world and become these phenomena.

Bruce Smith: We are a tiny little English country sitting in the shadow of the United States — and everywhere else in the world countries that aren't literally attached to the United States have to grapple with protecting their culture from 24/7 American cultural product. So for all the business arguments that are really important to us — that we are a sector that employs a lot of people and that culture is not just lighting money on fire — we also have to make the argument that it's incredibly important just to have a culture and it requires investment and desire from the people who want to be represented. It comes down to lobbying the government and lobbying the public. You're never going to win that argument, you just have to keep making it forever.

Bill Williams: What am I proudest of? Two things. One is that we had the perseverance to endure nearly a decade of internecine warfare because some people objected to the idea that writers were entitled to take charge of their collective working lives. The other is the staff. While members were getting a prolonged crash course in politicking and knife fighting, the staff got on with the business of policing our collective agreements and providing the level of service we all take for granted.

Chuck Lazer: I think it's important to remember that God didn't create the Guild on the eighth day. Those things we all value — the Guild, our production fee, insurance and retirement, coverage for animation writers — it's important to remember that they weren't always around. Our union brothers and sisters fought for them. When I look back on breaking away from ACTRA to form the Writers Guild of Canada, I think it's a really good thing that we did.

Cal Coons: The thing I was most proud of was when Konrad acknowledged to Maureen that the WGC had been right about the 1999 policy change being wrong. Just having them say the WGC had been right and the error needed to be corrected, having [CRTC Chair] Konrad von Finckenstein acknowledge that in session was pretty gratifying. I often wondered whether he was awake but it turned out he was.

Andrew Wreggitt: He didn't go to ACTRA, didn't go the DGC, didn't go to the producers; he went to Maureen and said you were the one who changed my mind about this. I was proud of that.

Mark Farrell: I think the Guild is a driving force in getting knowledge about TV writing and what it takes out there. They're up against so much and they've done so much. It's amazing how hard they — the people at the Guild, the administrators, the policy people and the writers who sit on the Council — work. I often lament

that when I'm running a show I'm trying to compete with shows that have a lot more resources; i.e., American shows. But the WGC is in the same boat when they bargain with producers or intervene at the CRTC. The Guild does so much with so little. I saw this in bargaining. Laurie Channer and everyone else — it's amazing what they do, I'm impressed.

Sarah Dearing: What am I proudest of? Building something and having it become viable and succeeding. There was quite a bit of skepticism. So, yes, just succeeding.

ADDENDUM

Maureen Parker: I was pretty young when I became Executive Director of the WGC in 1996. I didn't know as much as I should have but times were different. We were in crisis mode and I was a warm body, already working here. We needed plenty of help so I reached out to the best professional help available and I found it. I'd like to thank those people now:

David Zitberman, partner and head of the Entertainment Law Group, Goodmans LLP, was a real mentor. He taught me everything about the entertainment business and how to read contracts, including our own collective agreement. I really wouldn't have succeeded without him. When I was starting out and other industry lawyers refused to take on the Guild as a client, David was my guide. It didn't hurt that he was and is the top entertainment lawyer in our industry. He also set up our Canadian Screenwriters Collection Society (CSCS) and continues to advise us whenever we call. A mensch is our David.

Josh Phillips, Managing Partner, Ursel Phillips Fellows Hopkinson LLP, was articling as a union labour lawyer when I first met him at one of our sad Christmas parties. He had had a previous career in the theatre as well. We immediately became friends. I hitched the WGC's collective bargaining and industrial relations to Josh's rising star. He was cheap and brilliant, plus a ton of fun, which you need in those dark hours of bargaining. Josh has been with us for umpteen years now helping us close the deal.

Colette Matteau, previously with Matteau Poirier Avocats Inc., was our Quebec legal counsel. She retired right after the WGC's last bargaining session. That says something. Colette was invaluable. She was the best negotiator I have ever met. Bargaining or grieving or anything is so difficult in Quebec, way more so

than anywhere else in this country. Without Colette I would have jumped off a bridge. She taught me how to compromise and hold my temper. Good lessons. Colette's labour lawyer partner, Chantal Poirier, is our new Quebec counsel.

Finally I have to thank **Peter Grant**, counsel, past chair of Technology, Communications and Intellectual Property Group in Toronto, McCarthy Tétrault and 2011 recipient of the Writers Block Award. The WGC didn't become involved in public policy in Canada until 1998. Up until then we were focused on survival and had too much bargaining to do. But we all have strong writing skills and under Pete White's tutelage we discovered we were good at policy work from the start. Each of us had a role. I was the friendly one! But the machinations of the CRTC in particular went way beyond our level of expertise. We needed a regulatory and policy genius — and Peter Grant was our guy. Like David Zitberman before him, Peter had no qualms about giving a union advice. Peter is Canada's top expert in regulatory policy. I don't know how we got him but we did. Again we faced all sorts of conflict-of-interest rules. The big guys can block us from retaining the best lawyers simply by engaging them to do anything, at which point it becomes a conflict for their firm to take us on. That is what we were and are up against. Peter fought for all Canadian talent by focusing on the reversal of the 1999 TV policy. It took until 2010 to get that policy reversed with a minimum spend for drama imposed on our broadcasters. I know we love to compare bad times, but in the depths of those horrid 11 years I remember one summer when the only Canadian drama on the air was *Train 48*, which was being made for \$48,000 an episode. Peter, with his brain and dedication, saved our domestic industry. Let's hope he can do it again. ■