

Classic Canadian Reading!

November 15 – 22, 2008

A Book Week veteran looks forward

Kathy Stinson in conversation

It was November, 1983 – the seventh Canadian Children's Book Week. Seventeen authors were touring the country. Among them was a young woman, with two picture books to her name, who had only once been outside of Ontario. Now she was travelling through the flat wide expanses of southern Manitoba – Winnipeg, Brandon, Boissevain, Deloraine and others. Kathy Stinson recalls, "Everywhere I went, I thought, I want to come back here."

The trip was filled with new experiences, she says. "Because I had done so little travelling and because my lifestyle did not include much eating out, my first report was *filled* with places I was taken to eat." She still remembers a place called Baked Expectations, where she first tasted pumpkin cheesecake.

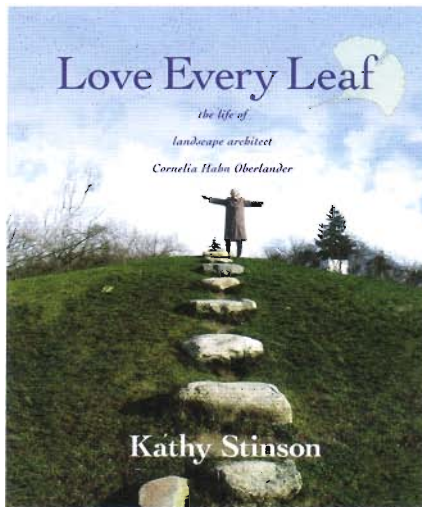
Secondly, she recalls, "I had not done many readings. So when I read 'How can I be Red Riding Hood in my blue coat?'" and a little boy called out 'She could be Blue Riding Hood,' it was a genuine surprise. I realized that a book could be a live thing and that kids could respond to it."

Lastly, she says, on her final day, she was being driven back to Winnipeg from a small town by the school principal. Looking out at the landscape, she was thinking "There's nothing out there!" Just then, he said, "This is my favourite part of the day; I love this drive."

"It opened my eyes," Stinson remembers. "I've never looked at a landscape the same way again; I've never found one boring."

In the 25 years between that first trip and her 2008 tour to British Columbia's Lower Mainland, Kathy Stinson has visited every province and territory, some for Book Week and some on other trips. "I'm still going places where children have never seen an author. There are places you go where kids have had many authors; but there are still places where they haven't had an author – or they haven't had *you*."

There are still questions and responses that surprise and excite her, too – like a



Kathy Stinson

Grade 6 girl who came up to her and asked "Should I be putting *feeling* into my writing?" Stinson recalls, "And you knew that, by spending another two minutes with that kid, she would go home and really fly!"

Stinson now has 25 books to her name and her short stories have been published in another 10 anthologies and collections. She's published middle years fiction and YA novels and taught writing for many years. "Now no one assumes I'm writing picture books because I couldn't write in other genres."

Yet, as she embarks on her tour of BC's Lower Mainland, Kathy Stinson will be sharing the feelings of other experienced Book Week authors like Ian Wallace (who first toured in 1977 – the inaugural Book Week) and Cora Taylor (who first toured in 1987). At the same time, her 2008 books offer her a sense of the newness that

accompanied her first trip and will accompany such first time Book Week authors as Wendy Lewis, Lorna Bennett, Chris Humphreys or Eric Zweig. Her picture book *A Pocket Can Have a Treasure In It* (illustrated by Deirdre Betteridge and published by her original publisher, Annick Press), is her first picture book in 20 years. "I'm thrilled to have that picture book. A lot of people assumed that, as my children got older, I had left picture books behind." She is looking forward to presenting it to young audiences, particularly as she feels that it offers a lot of possibility for kids' responses.

Stinson's other 2008 title is a completely new venture for her – a biography. *Love Every Leaf: The Life of Landscape Architect Cornelia Hahn Oberlander* is the first ever biography of the ground-breaking and feisty landscape architect whose work has been inspired by the natural world and by children's play. Since Oberlander lives in Vancouver, Kathy Stinson hopes that the two of them will be able to make an appearance together.

"For me, touring is wonderful," she adds, "It takes me on roads I haven't been on before – which is what I like about writing too."

Join the Writing Contest! Future Classics from Today's Kids

Get your students writing with the annual Imperial Oil Foundation Writing Contest – now in its seventh year! The contest is open to children in Grades 2 to 6 at the time of the contest deadline of December 15, 2008.

In honour of the 100th anniversary of L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, young writers are asked to send in a recently written story or poem that they think could become a classic and be read for the next 100 years. Students should keep in mind that classic books have memorable characters, engaging plots and keep readers on the edge of their seats until the very end.

The story or poem must be written during the current school year, and be no longer than 1,000 words. A winner is selected from each grade and each winner receives a \$200 gift certificate to the