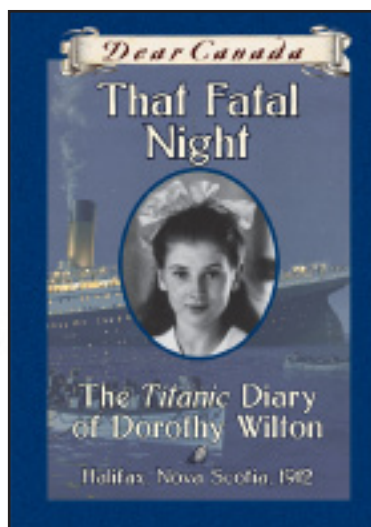


Book Fair Author Spotlight On...



Sarah Ellis



Q What inspires you to write?

A I'm inspired by the challenge of taking ordinary words, words available to everyone and cheap as can be, what we use every day to text, call the dog, order coffee, sing along, talk back to the tv, gossip, ask directions, describe our new shoes, and of those words to make a whole, particular, original world, a world that invites other people to join in, that connects me to folk I will never know.

Q What advice do you have for young writers?

A Read. Read on the page, read on the screen, read in a hammock, read in bed, read on the bus, read in the bath, read in a tree, read in a rowboat, read in a hide-out, read out loud, read in soft, read to your friends, read to your baby sister, read to your gerbil. Do not read while bungee jumping however.

Q What was your favourite book growing up?

A It's a five-way toss-up among *The Secret Garden*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *I Capture the Castle*, *Little House on the Prairie* and an old book that hardly anybody has ever heard of called *Madeleine Takes Command*.

Q What do you like to do when you're not writing?

A I like long walks. (The latest was a nine day walk along the route of Hadrian's Wall in England.) I garden. (My favourite part of gardening is finding a wild

patch and freeing the plants from weeds. This is exactly what happens in *The Secret Garden*.) I play the ukulele. (Badly but with enthusiasm.)

Q What has been the biggest achievement of your career so far?

A Almost everybody goes around with little voices in their heads which are the voices of their parents, letting you know what's right. My little voice says, among other things, never brag. It is probably not the best advice for a world in which publicity is so important, but it's the voice I've got and it's the reason I find this an impossible question.

Q With 2011 being the ten-year anniversary of *Dear Canada* and having written three books in the series, including *A Prairie as Wide as the Sea* which started it all, what is it about writing these stories that you find extraordinary?

A I've come to believe that if we want to understand history, if we want to really experience what life was like back then, our best lens is through the eyes of a child. When we look at history we're necessarily looking back but a child is looking forward. Their now is as immediate to them as our now is to us. Realizing that has somehow made all my nows richer. I walk across a field of dry grass in summer; I see a piece of old abandoned industrial machinery; I look out to sea from the deck of a ship; and I'm back there, in Milorie or Almonte or out on the Atlantic. It is both then and now at the same time.



SCHOLASTIC

Read Every Day. Lead a Better Life.

Dear Canada

Letter from the Editor...

Editing the *Dear Canada* books has given me thirty new best friends. Each of the diarists has such a distinct personality, with her own specific wants and challenges, that she really comes alive in my mind. When I'm hunting for a cover cameo, it's this personality that guides me in finding just the right photo or painting to fit the girl inside the book. And it's not always easy to find just the right girl...from the right time period...at the right age. Why? Throughout history, it was most often nobles or military leaders, or rich or famous men — not women and certainly not girls — who had their portraits painted or their photos taken. The faces for the cover cameos have come from museums as far away as Russia or Scotland...from archives in Canada...even from private collections.

For each *Dear Canada*, the diarist herself is fictional, but the facts of the story have to be accurate, and sometimes those facts are difficult to pin down. A few that nearly stumped us were: How would someone get a letter to Canada out of Occupied France during WWII? and Did some prospectors in the gold rush really bring camels into B.C. to use as pack animals? The most surprising fact was that in the 1700s there were two calendars being used, with two different dates for the new year — one on January 1 and one on March 25 — so that made for some interesting handling of the datelines in the diary.

Twists and turns in the research can also paint the writers into a corner, so that they have to rework what they'd originally written. But it has also been amazing to go along for the ride with these writers, to help them get out of those corners, or to have those



Sandy Bogart Johnston

Shortlisted for Editor of the Year,
CBA Libris Awards 2011

“eureka moments” when a fact turns up that we've hunted so hard to find, sometimes sending the story in a new and exciting direction.

One of the most satisfying things about editing the *Dear Canada* series is working with the authors on such a variety of topics and periods in Canada's past. I cannot think of people I would rather work with, writers who are not only good at research, but who also have extraordinary creativity and inventiveness. It's wonderful for me to inhabit the world of their characters for a while — to find out what each girl yearns for or fears or finds exciting. I'm grateful to each and every writer of this series for the last ten amazing years.



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