

## Salon questionnaire

**Renowned writer and photographer says she is inspired by the shy light of a spring sunrise – and finds the greatest joy in her grandchildren**

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### **q Age?**

a 58

### **q Provenance?**

a Born in Connecticut. Came to New Brunswick in 1970 and am still living in the same place, Markhamville, south of Sussex.

### **q Why writing?**

a I've wanted to be a writer since I was 8. Probably because I grew up in the country, with no television, not a lot of other kids to play with, a great library, a grandfather who read aloud, and an active imagination. Sometimes, even now, as when I was a child, the world of fiction seems more real than the real world.

### **q What was your breakthrough moment?**

a When an editor at Penguin, Jackie Kaiser, decided to champion my first book, *Seeds of Another Summer*. She became my guide, support, friend, and critic. Now she's my agent.

### **q What would you be if you weren't a writer?**

a I came close to two choices when I was in my 20s - going to theatre school, or taking an advanced degree in literature. I see myself, now, being a character actress, exposing my wrinkles to the camera.

### **q Your current obsession?**

a Climate change. Personal changes and choices to reduce my own carbon footprint, including doubling the size of my vegetable garden, using solar-heated water, having an energy audit done on our house and implementing the suggestions, evaluating things like cleaners, packaging, light sources, travel miles, lawns (wildflowers, instead), dryer (clothesline and racks instead).

### **q What are you working on next?**

a I'm in the final stages of editing a novel which will be published by Knopf Canada in April, 2009. I'll be doing the fun stuff soon: emerging from my solitude, working on the novel's production with other people, and then going out and reading.

### **q What place on Earth inspires you?**

a I love windswept, stony places where people have wrested a living from a seemingly inhospitable land. The Yorkshire Dales. The Outer Hebrides.

### **q What place in New Brunswick inspires you?**

a I'm inspired by the valley I live in. I am continually arrested by its unexpected beauty. The shy light of a spring sunrise. A bald eagle flying in snow. A red fox trotting beneath the maples. The kindness of neighbours, the sense of community.

### **q Secret indulgence?**

a Dark chocolate.

### **q Your favourite hero of fiction?**

a It's more about the voices, being inside someone's head and looking out.

There are so many fictional people I love to be. I can't begin to name only one.

**q What is your greatest extravagance?**

a Space.

**q What is your greatest fear?**

a Deafness. I have artificial stapes in both ears. I know what it's like not to be able to hear. I hope they never fail.

**q Greatest joy?**

a My family, four generations. Especially my granddaughters, 6 and 3.

**q Your favourite book?**

a No favourites.

**q Favourite book by a New Brunswick writer?**

a No favourites.

**q What are you reading?**

a I usually read three or four books at once. We are going to the Arctic in September, so I'm reading Lady Franklin's Revenge and Ancient Peoples of the Arctic. Also Nabokov's memoir Speak, Memory, and an Australian novelist I've recently discovered, Kate Grenville, whose book The Idea of Perfection I just finished.

**q What's on your iPod?**

a I don't have an iPod. On my iTunes, however, is Mozart's Vesperae Sollenes de Confessore, which I'm learning to sing for this year's Choral Fest.

**q What talent would you like to have?**

a Singing. With a glorious, pure, strong voice.

**q What is the greatest public misconception about writing?**

a That editors tear your work apart and are like your worst teacher in school. (Editors are wonderful!)

**q Your most treasured possession?**

a Life, of course. And all that goes with it. Having the privilege of being a human being on this planet, with its intricate mysteries and almost unbearable beauty.

**q What is your motto?**

a Taught to me by New Brunswick's wonderful Dr. E. Smith - "So what," accompanied by, "get a grip."

**q How would you like to die?**

a Holding hands with the people who love me. And taking the vision a step further, on a particular bed of deep moss, just off the ridge trail, listening to the whispering firs.

**q What book do you wish you could have written and why?**

a Anna Karenina. Tolstoy can paint the tiniest details on the largest canvas. He spares no detail, and yet keeps the pulse of narrative.

**q Who are your favourite writers?**

a Again, I hate to pick favourites. Here are some that I see on my shelves: Tolstoy, Faulkner, Dickens, Virginia Woolf (her picture hangs beside my desk), Marilynne Robinson (Housekeeping), J.R.R. Tolkien, Gary Snyder, Seamus Heaney, Vikram Seth, Ian McEwan, Helen Dunmore. I am very excited by contemporary Canadian authors, like Joan Clark, Lisa Moore, Elizabeth Hay, Francis Itani, etc. The etceteras are numerous and important. Too many to list. It's what I read, mostly, nowadays, and I'm drawn to women writers, whose voices were so muted during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

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