

denotes [Subscription](#) | [Login](#) | [Free](#)



Search Site [More Search Options/Archives](#)

Search Tips



INSIDER Edition

[Privacy Policy](#)
[Subscribe to Globe](#)
[Publisher's Note](#)

TODAY'S PAPER

ENTERTAINMENT

[Break](#)
[Lates](#)

- Breaking News
- Home Page
- Business
- Personal Finance
- National
- International
- From the Field
- Sports
- Entertainment
- Book Club
- Technology

Canada's week to wax poetic

Look out for poets on the loose likely to burst into verse, ALEXANDRA GILL warns

By ALEXANDRA GILL
Monday, October 25, 2004 - Page R1

[E-mail this Article](#)

[Print this Article](#)

Advertisement

Ads by Goooooogle

Poetry Contest - \$10,000

Are You A Poet? Enter to Win \$10,000!
[PoetryWeekly.com](#)

Poetry Poem

Poetry Poem for sale. aff Check out the deals now!
[www.eBay.com](#)

Horse Lovers

Date tens of thousands of single horse lovers. Register free.
[www.EquestrianCupid.coi](#)

New Beginnings Hankies

Gift boxed wedding hankies can be personalized w/poems and embroidery

PREMIUM CONTENT
INSIDER Edition

- Columnists
- Latest News
- GlobeEdge
- GlobeWatch



- Special Reports
- China Rising New!
- University Report Card
- U.S. Election Board Games
- Comment
- Science & Health
- Photo Desk
- Small Business
- Business Travel
- Golf Guide & Game

- Today's Paper
- Front Page
- Report On Business
- National
- International
- Sports
- Comment
- Entertainment
- Top Stories
- Art

Columnists



[John Doyle](#)
Television



[Kate Taylor](#)
Arts



[Johanna Schneller](#)
Moviegoer

VANCOUVER -- Don't be alarmed if a stranger stops you in the street today to recite a rhyming stanza for your listening pleasure. It could very well be an imaginative homeless person looking for spare change. More likely, it will be one of 27 Canadian poets who are taking part in Random Acts of Poetry Week, the first cross-country public celebration of poetry.

From Newfoundland to British Columbia, published poets in 17 cities will be popping into parks, hair salons, cafés, supermarkets, libraries and wherever else tickles their fancy to delight randomly chosen strangers with bursts of poetry. The lucky few who encounter these strolling minstrels of verse will receive a free book of poetry, courtesy of Abebooks.com. The Victoria-based on-line bookstore is sponsoring the event, in association with the Victoria READ Society, to promote poetry and raise awareness around literacy.

"It will be like an island of beauty in the middle of their day," says Wendy Morton, the poet from Sooke, B.C., on Vancouver Island, who spearheaded the event.

In Vancouver, Fiona Lam plans to seek out mothers in parks and pregnant passengers on the SkyTrain to read from her *Intimate*

TV Li
Enter

Movie
Glob
Enter

Advar
Review

Infor
Enter

Reco
Enter




News
Leisu
Get F
review
Style
to you
Friday

Books
Columnists
Film
Music
Theatre
Style
Television

Columnists
Headline Index

Other Sections

Appointments
Books
Births & Deaths
Careers
Cars
Cartoon
Classifieds
Crosswords 
Education
Environment
Facts & Arguments
Focus
Features
Health
Horoscopes
Obituaries
Online Personals
Real Estate
R.O.B. Magazine
ROB TV
Science
Style
Toronto
Travel

Advertising Info

Advertise with The
Globe: Newspaper,
Web, and Magazine

Services

Newspaper
Corrections
Customer Care
Help & Contact Us
Reprints
Subscriptions
Recognition Card
Web site
Canada 411
E-mail Newsletters
Free Headlines
Help & Contact Us
Register Now!
Make Us Home
Mobile
Photo Store
Press Room
Privacy Policy
Terms & Conditions
Yellow Pages

Distances, a finalist in last year's City of Vancouver Book Awards, which explores childhood and relationships. In Edmonton, Jannie Edwards and Wendy McGrath will read at the city's Waste Management Plant, and Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, in addition to other spontaneously chosen locations.

In Toronto, Sheila Stewart will don her mother's hat and hit the streetcar to read from *A Hat to Stop a Train*, her book of poetry that deals with the story of her mother, a United Church minister's wife from Northern Ireland, and her colourful collection of hats. Stewart and fellow Toronto poet Andrea Thompson might even stop traffic on Highway 401 when they get on a CB radio and read for truckers.

"Poetry is often perceived as a bitter pill," says Carolyn Marie Souaid, a participating poet from Montreal. "This will be an opportunity to knock poetry out of the ivory tower. This is an invitation for the everyday person on the street to slow down a little and enjoy a literary burst of energy for what it is -- nourishment for the soul."

Poetry can be practical too. "This is an opportunity to prove that when you hear a poem at a bus stop, it makes your wait seem shorter and that hearing a poem while you sit beneath a salon hair dryer makes your hair dry faster and evenly," says Vancouver poet Billeh Nickerson.

"Poetry shouldn't be a scary thing. It should be shared -- and celebrated -- wherever, all the time," Nickerson says.

If it all sounds wonderfully weird, well, the event's genesis is even weirder. It all began when Morton, an insurance investigator by day, was caught speeding on her way home from a poetry reading last year. Morton offered to read the police officer a poem. He liked it, and told Morton he wasn't going to give her a ticket, but warned her not to drive so fast.

"See what you can do with poetry?" Morton says. "That was my first random act."

Morton, a 64-year-old poet with incredible chutzpah, had already convinced the folks at WestJet Airlines to sponsor her as their "poet of the skies."

The airline gave her free flights to get to readings across the country for her first book, *Private Eye*. In exchange, Morton would read poetry to passengers during the flight, and write short poems for anyone who requested one.

One man asked her to write a poem for a friend, who wasn't on the flight. When she contacted this friend at a later date, he told her about his grandfather, Clare, who had moved into a retirement home two years earlier -- when he was 103 -- and discovered he loved hanging out in the TV room with his new beer-drinking buddies on hockey night. The friend loved her poem, and they continued to correspond.

Around the same time, Morton bumped into David Grierson, the CBC Radio morning host in Victoria. He told her a story about his visit to a school in Sooke for Pocket Poetry Day. The students, who were surprisingly engaged, had all written out poems and tucked the sheets into their pockets. All day long, they would stop each other in the hallways, pull out the poems and randomly read to each other.

"It was such a great idea," says Morton, who was inspired to do something similar last fall when she went to the Maritimes for her second book tour. She convinced DaimlerChrysler to loan her a cherry-red PT Cruiser -- because "poetry travels" -- and became their poet of the road. For 10 days, Morton drove from town to town all across Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, dropping into

local barbershops, churches and restaurants to read her poems. Chrysler also bought \$500 worth of books that she gave out -- but she didn't get to keep the car.

"It was a great success," says Morton, who swears not one person turned down her request to read to them.

Morton decided these random acts of poetry should become a national event. So she went back to her friend, a well-to-do businessman, and asked if he was interested in donating to the cause. He offered to match whatever money she raised.

Enter Abebooks.com, which ponied up \$15,000 to help buy the books that will be handed out this week. The company also created a website, <http://www.randomactsofpoetry.com>, and is paying Morton's band of poets \$5 for each book they give out.

"I always get asked to do freebies," says Nickerson, who will be reading from his book *The Asthmatic Glassblower* for both the mayor and patrons of the Pump Jack, a West End gay leather bar. "But this is what I do for a living. To get paid for it, well, it's an added perk and a huge show of respect."

Nickerson's only worry is that some of his poems -- the Wayne Gretzky erotic fantasy, for instance -- might be a bit racy for some.

"People might be embarrassed," Nickerson says. "Reading poetry to strangers is a very intimate act. It's kind of like a poetic lap dance."

 [E-mail this Article](#)

 [Print this Article](#)

Site Search

[Subscribe to The Globe and Mail](#)

[Sign up for our daily e-mail News Update](#)

[Back to Entertainment](#)

[Disclaimer](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help & Contact Us](#) | [Come register. It's Free.](#)

© Copyright 2004 Bell Globemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

