



AGM: OCTOBER 2, 2021 PRESIDENT'S REPORT

PEI Writers' Guild members:

If there was a theme to the 2020–2021 PEIWG year it would be one of adapting, changing, and rethinking. Like organizations all over the world, we were faced with the reality of a constantly present pandemic with periods of elevated risk that forced us to rethink our events and offerings. I won't lie: this year was challenging, but I am so proud of our hard-working Board who managed to still pull off an active roster of activities to offer our members.

Here's how 2020–2021 looked for the PEI Writers' Guild:

COVID-19 & Workshops

The fall of 2020 saw COVID-19 still a serious reality, so the Board of Directors made the decision to move all of our workshops online. We hosted the following workshops this year via Zoom:

- Drop the Mic: Intro to Spoken Word (Facilitator: Dr. Julie Bull)—13 participants
- Comedic Storytelling (Facilitator: Heather Jordon Ross)—18 participants
- Self-Publishing 101 (Facilitator: C.E. Flores)—17 participants
- The Art of Blogging: A Virtual Panel (Panelists: Justin Shaw, Pelumi Ajao, Michelle Macdonald)—4 participants
- Book Marketing: An Introduction (Facilitator: Patti Larsen)—19 participants

We also started recording workshops and offering as separate webinars on our online store. For the workshops that were interactive and depended on a live audience, we asked the facilitator to record a separate webinar version of their workshop.

While our online store is live, we haven't yet promoted it. Plans for an official announcement/launch for November 2021.

<https://www.peiwritersguild.com/Online-Store>

By moving our workshops online, we increased our national visibility. In each workshop, we had 3–5 participants from across Canada, some of whom started attending subsequent PEIWG workshops. The PEIWG has an opportunity to appeal to writers in other parts of Canada who either had ties to PEI or appreciate smaller groups. It is our hope to create a following and recruit some of these attendees for future Wild Threads festivals.

Reading Town

With funding from TD Bank Canada, we were able to facilitate family literacy events throughout the Island in October 2020. The specific events included:

- Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI Writing Workshop with Patti Larsen
- Promenade littéraire (PEI Public Library) | Friends of the Regional Summerside Library – Story Walk
- Book Launch: *Broken Crayons* by Patsy Dingwell (Farmers Helping Farmers)
- Camp Awesome Double Book Launch
- Summerside Sparks Author Visit (*Jaya's Magic Wheelchair* by Marlene Bryenton)
- Julie Pellissier-Lush Family Reading at the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Center
- PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada produced a video, “Annes of the World” with Board Member Todd MacEachern
- “Introduction to Journalling” — a workshop for Members of the PEIANC Newcomer community; Mo Duffy Cobb volunteered her time and PEIWG sponsored it by buying journals for all participants

The funding opportunity arose with little planning time, and while the PEIWG Executive managed to organize promotion of the fund, evaluating community proposals, promoting events, and distributing the funds, it did entail a lot of work at a time when the Board was busy preparing for the AGM and figuring out Guild operations in the COVID-era.

Island-wide Read-a-thon

The PEIWG hosted an Island-wide Read-a-thon on Sunday, November 1. This event took place online and was promoted via Twitter and Instagram. Prizes were awarded to participants via random draws. Sponsorship for prizes came from Seaside Books (Summerside), the Bookman (Charlottetown), and Buttercup Café and Bookstore.

Battle Tales VI

We held Battle Tales VI in January 2021. While we were unable to have the social trivia event that traditionally accompanies announcing the winner, we did still host the contest.

We had 42 entries, a number that reflects how engaged this particular audience is. People really appreciate and enjoy the format of Battle Tales.

Battle Tales VI: The Pandemic Edition created a rich amount of writing about the pandemic. Although the Writers' Guild attempted to find funding to self-publish the anthology, we were not successful. It is something we should consider again in the future. Self publishing an anthology and sell it on our website in our online store.

Up until now, there hasn't been a cost to enter Battle Tales, but there is a cost to hosting the contest. Expenses include honorariums for the judge, prize for the winner, Facebook ad boost, and prizes for the runners-up.

Something we may wish to consider next year is to either find a sponsor for the event or include a \$5 admission fee.

Virtual Open Mic

We hosted two virtual open mics this year: One through the PEI Public Library in April (13 attendees) and one for BIPOC creatives in June for National Indigenous People's Day (#OwnVoices, 22 attendees). Participation was healthy, and there is still an appetite for this type of event.

Island Literary Awards

The 34th annual Island Literary Awards and Rotary Club of Charlottetown Royalty Creative Writing Awards for Young People took place May 30, 2021. We were able to hold in-person award ceremonies this year, while maintaining public health guidelines. Please see separate report for more details on the ILAs, including the two new awards we were able to present: the Black Cultural Society of PEI Scott Parsons Literary Award and the Prince Edward Island Association for Newcomers to Canada Award.

Wild Threads 2021

Wild Threads took place in August 2021. A final report is forthcoming. Overall, while numbers were down due to COVID-19, the organizing committee remain satisfied with how the event unfolded. Evaluations from the festival were extremely positive.

What worked well:

- Programming: Participants raved about the workshops themselves with facilitators receiving above-average ratings and comments
- The pay-per-session model: Participants loved being able to pick and choose which sessions to attend; this model made the festival more accessible and also qualifies us for Canadian Heritage funding in future years
- The networking socials: Participants loved gathering (safely) in person
- TicketPro: Well worth the \$500 + fee investment; amazing customer service and they were able to manage individual ticket sales as well as ticket package bundles and refunds (something that would have taken PEIWG board members a great amount of time to organize)

Challenges we'll be addressing with the Wild Threads committee and BOD members:

- Committee and board-level involvement: We need more help to plan sessions earlier in order to release the schedule and open registrations earlier in the year
- Sticking to the pay-per-session model, is there a way to minimize risk of sessions with low attendance rates?
- Opportunity for swag to sell ahead of, and during, Wild Threads
- Ideal number of events

Executive Director Position

Much of the Executive's energy in recent months has been expanding the hours for the ED position, up from 10 to 20 per week. We're happy to report we've worked with our Treasurer to secure the budget for a 20 hour/week position, starting September 30, 2021.

Our first ED, Mo Duffy Cobb, announced in April 2021 her intention on stepping down from the position, agreeing to stay on until the Board could advertise the position, interview short-listed candidates, and onboard the new ED.

We're thrilled that Shawn Hogan has accepted the position of the Executive Director for the Guild. He started with us just this week.

The vision remains to grow this position into a full-time job. This is needed in order to grow the Guild, enabling it to fulfill its vision while respecting that the Board is made up of volunteers with other commitments. To avoid high turn-over rate and volunteer burnout, the PEIWG needs a full-time ED.

Diversity & Inclusion

One of the goals that came out of the Strategic Planning Session the Board took in January 2020 was to make diversity and inclusion more of a focus.

The PEIWG was able to take the following actions in line with this vision:

- Creating a Diversity & Inclusion committee
- Partnering with the Black Cultural Society to co-fund a new ILA award
- Partnering with the PEIANC to co-fund a new ILA award
- Hosting an open mic for BIPOC voices
- Taking anti-racism training from BIPOC USHR—this training took place in March 2021 via Zoom
- Offering two bursary spots/workshop for BIPOC creators

The Diversity and Inclusion committee will continue to meet to identify ways the PEIWG can be more representative of a wider range of voices, including:

- Establishing an award for 2SLGBTQ+ creators at the ILAs
- Encouraging more voices from underrepresented communities to join the PEIWG—general membership, committees, and/or the Board
- Instagram Lives with BIPOC authors, 2SLGBTQ+ authors, and authors living with various seen and unseen disabilities
- We're in discussion with PEI Library about organizing a Drag Queen StoryTime
- Habibi: Love in English and Arabic through the Words of Kahlil Gibran – organized for Feb 2022

2021–2022 Vision

We're beginning another season with COVID-19 still a present concern. For that reason, the PEIWG is looking to keep workshops online for another year. Doing so will not only increase national visibility, but it'll also allow us to promote Wild Threads as a coveted in-person literary opportunity. Our workshops should highlight Wild Threads and funnel people to this annual festival. In this way, Wild Threads can become the flagship product of the PEIWG.

Additionally, hosting workshops online is more cost-efficient—something we need to be mindful of in our desire to find funds to grow the ED position.

With a new ED in place and several Board and Committee members stepping down from last year, the PEIWG is in a current transitional phase. For that reason, and to allow the remaining Board Members some breathing space, all activities and meetings were paused for September 2021.

Post-AGM (with election of new Board Members), monthly Board meetings will resume, as well as Committee Meetings for workshops, Diversity and Inclusion, Island Literary Awards, and Wild Threads.

I wish to take this moment to thank Board members stepping down, for all their time and energy over the past year:

- Ilona Daniel
- Tanya McCallum
- Julie Pellissier-Lush

We now have space to welcome more Board Members for the upcoming year—I know we have some nominations to consider today, a little later on in the meeting.

And to the Board Members remaining on for another year:

- Sophia Ball
- Michelle Harris Genge
- Emma Fugate
- Todd MacEwan
- Kirstin Lund
- Elizabeth Iwunwa
- Dylan Roberts

A special thank you and warm wishes to our former President and first Executive Director, Mo Duffy Cobb. So many of the initiatives outlined in this report are because of her enthusiasm and energy to advance and support the literary arts on PEI. We will miss Mo dearly and hope that she can continue to share her energy with us from time to time, in various capacities.

Despite all the twists and turns COVID-19 continues to throw at us, the PEIWG is committed to forging ahead to offer desired programming to its members. Here's to 2021–2022!



Christine Gordon Manley
President, PEIWG