

The Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction

Here is a version of what I said on Monday, Nov. 12 at the award gala, right after Mrs. Weston opened the envelope and said "The winner is..."

It may seem strange to accept an award for literary nonfiction by acknowledging that one small part of it is fiction, but that is what I feel obliged to do.

This revelation applies not only to *A Geography of Blood* but also to every nonfiction book you have read or will read in the future.

I'm referring to the line on the cover that states the name of author, implying that the book is the work of a single individual. I doubt if that is true of any book, and I know that it is not true of *Geography*.

That having been said, I am, to the best of my knowledge, the only person who thought about this project and the special problems it presents every day, without fail, for the last six or eight years.

Yet this book could not have been written without the generous cooperation of the people of the Nekaneet First Nation, particularly former chief Alice Paytahken and the members of her council.

It could not have been written without the assistance of my dear friend -- a respected member of the Nekaneet community--Jean Francis Oakes.

It could not have been written without the support of Clare McNab, then Kikawinaw, and Patrick Wallace of the Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, a correctional institution for federally sentenced Aboriginal women on Nekaneet land in the Cypress Hills.

It could not have been written without the mischievous and sometimes exacting counsel of the brilliant Narcisse Blood of the Kainai First Nation and Red Crow College.

It would not have been possible without the Eastend Arts Council – imagine, a community of 600 people that runs a writers' retreat – or without the people who began writing the landscape of southern Saskatchewan long before I thought of doing so. I'm thinking of writers like the late Andrew Suknaski, Sharon Butala, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Trevor Herriot, the late John Tobias and my unwitting sparing partner, the late Wallace Stegner.

It is a special pleasure to acknowledge the support of the citizens of Canada and of Saskatchewan, through the Canada Council for the Arts and the Saskatchewan Arts Board. Did you know that the Saskatchewan Arts Board is the oldest public sponsor of the arts in North America? Another reason we have to be grateful to Tommy Douglas.

Even when the book was finished – when it had a beginning, middle and end – help was still close at hand. That's when I had the benefit of skillful and conscientious assistance

from my editor, Nancy Flight of Greystone Books and from my publisher, Rob Sanders, who has been at my side from the very beginning of my book-writing adventure.

I can never adequately express my gratitude to Keith Bell, my partner of twenty years, who listened to every new paragraph hot off the screen and coped with both my occasional bouts of frustration and my perennial distraction – I think that living with a writing must be hell—and hardly ever asked me to snap of it.

Once the short-list for this award was announced, I found myself surrounded by another family, the staff at the Writers' Trust – Amanda, James and Don and publicist Becky – who I think have made all of us feel like winners from the start. Mrs. Weston, you have chosen your collaborators well. And I hope, dear lady, that you know how much your support means not only to the five of us but to the entire literary community in Canada.

It has been an honour to find myself in the company of the four finalists for this award, fabulous writers all – Kamal Al-Solaylee, Modris Ecksteins, Taras Grescoe, and J.J. Lee. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for the jury to choose one of the entries for special commendation, since each of the books perfectly fulfills its author's intention. I am very grateful to all their jurists for their care and expertise and for being ideal readers of my book.

None of this would be of the slightest importance if it weren't for people like you, people who are fascinated by the world around you and madly in love with words. In the end (and this is the end) we are all in this together. Thank you.