

Candace Savage was very nearly born on the front seat of a pickup truck somewhere between Valhalla Centre (a cluster of frame houses at the intersection of two gravel roads in the Peace River Country of northern Alberta) and the Grande Prairie hospital. Her mother, Edna Sherk, had resigned her position as the primary teacher at the local two-room school a few months earlier, to prepare for her first child, but her dad, Harry, had stayed on as principal and senior teacher. The trip to the hospital had been delayed until classes were dismissed for the day, and what with a bitter wind to slow their progress and rutted roads to hasten the birth, the baby came within minutes of being delivered en route.

In the event, of course, she was born to care and comfort (on 2 December 1949), and so her life continued. Her first word was “book”—or so her bookish parents said—and though the family didn’t have much of a library, her mother always found something to read to her. After her two younger sisters were born, her mother read to them, too, so that Candace was able to extend the pleasures of bed-time stories almost into her teens. For several years, the family subscribed to a series of children’s classics called Junior Deluxe Editions, hard-bound books with tan covers and pastel backs that arrived each month by mail. They bore titles like Anne of Green Gables, The Jungle Book, Little Women and The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Cuddled up on the couch with her sisters, listening to their mother’s voice, Candace soaked up the rhythms of written English. To this day, she still writes “by ear,” listening to the beat of her sentences as she composes them.

Even though she often found school dead boring, she was good at passing tests and, in 1967, was admitted to the University of Alberta in Edmonton on a scholarship. She graduated four years later with an Honours Degree in English and was awarded the Governor-General’s Gold Medal and the Rutherford Gold Medal in English for the year of her graduation. As part of her program, she completed an independent-study project on metaphor with Wilfred Watson, who was a poet, philosopher and playwright as well as a professor. He encouraged her to develop a kind of intellectual “peripheral vision,” so that, by looking at things from an angle instead of straight on, she could notice patterns and connections that were otherwise hidden.

By this time, Candace had been bopping around Alberta with her family for twenty-odd years, with stops in Beaverlodge, Vermilion, Pincher Creek and Edmonton and a couple of brief forays into northern British Columbia. In 1970, she married Arthur Savage, a physics graduate whom she had met at the U of A, and they moved to Saskatoon, where he found work as a lab instructor. What to do? For several years, she teased herself with the idea of doing graduate work in English or History or Biology or Medicine or Medieval Studies.... But eventually she realized that (a) as a female, she could expect a rough ride in academia and (b) she could be more creative without the strictures of a narrow discipline. And so she started to write.

Her first books—A Harvest Yet to Reap (co-authored with three other women) and Our Nell (a biography of Nellie L. McClung)—explored the history of women in western Canada. Then, when Arthur decided that he wanted to write, too, she collaborated with him on a book about the mammals of western Canada. These two themes—women's/cultural history and natural science—have persisted throughout her career and, between them, have so far found expression in more than two dozen books. By allowing herself to roam across the widest possible range of subjects, she keeps her mind on high alert and avoids the risk of becoming complacent or over-confident!

A daughter, Diana, was born in Saskatoon in 1979, and Arthur died unexpectedly about two years later. After moving to Edmonton and then to Yellowknife, Candace and Diana returned to Saskatoon in 1990, where Candace served for a term as Writer-in-Residence at the Public Library. In 1992, Candace had the good fortune to meet Keith Bell, a historian who teaches in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Saskatchewan, with whom she fully intends to live happily ever after.