

# The writer next door

Red Deer  
Advocate  
May 2

*Most authors don't fit the stereotypical image — and Alberta is home to a lot more of them than we might think*

By CARL HAHN  
LIFE staff

The writer, moody and unpredictable, angst-ridden, wintering in his tiny Paris apartment, chain-smoking and drinking his way through another manuscript that will lead to endless squabbles with his publisher.

John Lent is uncertain how that overly romanticized stereotype of the struggling author fits to define. The writing instructor with seven published books to his name, now dean of Okanagan College in Vernon, B.C., knows Canadian authors are nothing like that. They're as varied as any other artisan, and these days come from pretty well anywhere.

"You're still chain-smoking and drinking, but in a small place like Vegreville or some thing," he says, following it up with a long laugh.

Lent, who will be offering two public readings at Red Deer College this month, is pleased with how the Canadian writing community has expanded since he grew up in Edmonton in the 1950s.

"I can tell you now, when the writers were in Western Canada at that time," he says.

Sinclair Ross, W.O. Mitchell and Margaret Laurence were the big names. Beyond that, Lent can list only three names.

"There was a handful. Now we have these huge writing communities in a city like Red Deer. So it's a good time to be engaged in it."

Lent's main reason for coming to Red Deer College is as writer-in-residence, a week-long program May 10 to 17, where local

writers can have their work critiqued and improved. Having taught writing since the 1970s, Lent is still eager to help budding writers bloom.

"There's never been a better time to go into it than now."

Many "vibrant" small Canadian presses are supporting potent Canadian authors now, and there's a stronger interest in Canadian fiction and poetry than ever before. While the media work to create literary stars, the days are none of having a small number of literary monoliths like Hemingway or Joyce, Lent believes.

Instead there are many "regional writers", such as himself, he suggests. He's done all right: four books of poetry, three books of fiction, and a short-listing for the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. But he wouldn't make a living without his full-time academic job.

"There's not a lot of money in it, unless you enter the really serious commercial market," he admits. "The film contracts and groupies and condos in L.A. don't come as part of the deal."

In Western Canada, however, he's developing a recognizable name. *Monet's Garden*, his 1986 collection of short stories, is in its third printing. The 2005 sequel, *So It Won't Go Away*, is in its second printing, and the two have combined for nearly 5,000 copies sold.

May 10 Lent will be reading from his work and offering an informal talk on the structure of fiction and how it's changed over the past four decades. He hopes it will give direction to local writers who have the talent and the subject material to work with.

The following week he will

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the Red Deer community. As the new dean at Okanagan College he isn't teaching in this term, so his time in Red Deer is an opportunity to work with writers, and help bust the myth that you have to live in Paris or New York to have anything worth writing about.

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The following week he will read a short story from *So It Won't Go Away*.  
He's also looking forward to the chance to chat with writers from

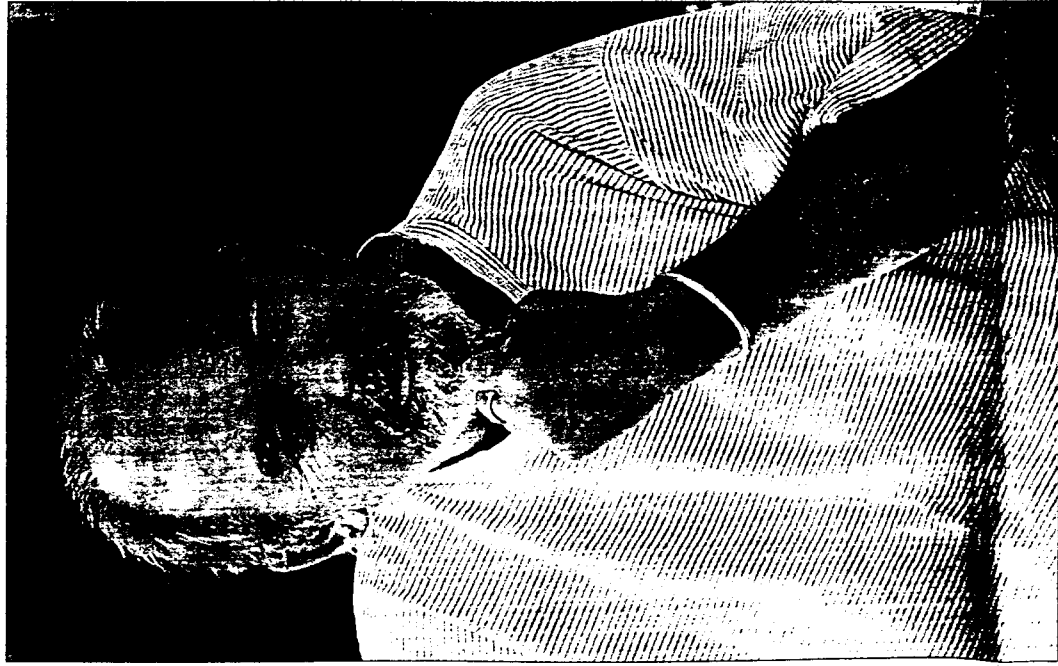
"Whatever's in front of me is as interesting as anything I'll see in Paris or London. Red Deer is interesting."

And — aside from the writing community — he already knows what he's going to find interesting. "I'm really looking forward to

being in Red Deer in May. I love the smell of it. It reminds me so much of growing up in Edmonton."

Readings by John Lent are scheduled May 10 and May 17, both at 7:30 p.m., at the Red Deer College library. The accompanying talk on May 10 is entitled, "Enjoying the

Distance, various challenges and strategies for managing long manuscripts." May 17, Lent is joined by Saskatoon fiction writer Jill Robinson. Both events are free and open to the public.  
Contact Carl Hahn at [chahn@reddeeradvocate.com](mailto:chahn@reddeeradvocate.com).



John Lent, who has seven books to his credit, is this year's writer-in-residence. Photo submitted.

# Writer: Red Deer as interesting as London or Paris to Lent