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Authors bring a sense of place, time to Mulmur

By Brock Weir

There is a story behind every stitch in the Canadian tapestry and writers bringing these stories to life are set to converge on Mulmur this Sunday, August 20, for the annual Authors in the Hills of Mulmur.

Featuring authors Hugh Brewster, Drew Hayden Taylor, Sandra Perron, and Robert Rotenberg, this year's event ? which is set to take place in a barn at 587146 Side Road 10 ? focuses on ?Canadians telling their stories.?

Celebrated thriller writer Robert Rotenberg, who is also a prominent Toronto-based criminal lawyer, will take those in attendance well beyond the walls of the barn to consider their ?sense of place.?

?People say Toronto is kind of a character in my books,? says Rotenberg, whose latest, The Heart of the City, is set in the bustling, insular world of Kensington Market where growth comes to call. ?The big issue in the city right now is this extraordinary construction boom. Toronto has been turned from a city of homes to a city of condos and more people are now living in multiple dwellings than in single family dwellings and the prices are going through the ceiling.?

This very ?Toronto? problem forms the backdrop of the story as protests greet a condo development slated for the edge of the bustling neighbourhood.

?I've never understood why so many TV shows, films, and books do what I call ?Toronto-lite' where Toronto is more of a backdrop,? says Rotenberg, who just finished co-writing an upcoming episode of the very Toronto-centric Murdoch Mysteries. ?What I find from the emails and reviews I get, especially from Canadian readers, they love reading about their own country and their own city.?

It took Rotenberg 10 years to write his first novel which, unpublished, is still lying in his desk drawer. When he zeroed in on one particular character from his early works, a lawyer, he saw the value in the age-old advice of writing what you know.

Eventually, with another book under his belt, he got a call from his agent, who bore some welcome news: his next effort was garnering multiple bids from New York publishers.

?It was a pipe dream, I had no way of knowing if I would break through, but then the book sold in nine different languages and the moment she called I knew it was actually going to happen,? he says. ?The lives of criminal lawyers and detectives in Toronto is the life I live every day. Being a criminal lawyer is really storytelling and I would say being a lawyer has made me a better writer, and being a writer has made me a better lawyer.?

While Rotenberg's presentation will focus on metaphorically breaking down the barn walls to consider ?a sense of place in novels,? children's author Hugh Brewster will take down a few planks of his own, asking book lovers to consider not a sense of place, but rather a sense of time.

In recent years, much of Brewster's writing has focused on making the theme of Canadians in War accessible to young readers.

When he started that writing journey, Brewster says there wasn't much of a market for it, but over the last 20 years, interest has surged.

?It interesting that it is another generation who have become interested in this,? he says. ?Now, battlefield tours, visiting Vimy Ridge and exploring people in one's family or community who were in the wars has become a big thing. Anyone who says Canadian

history is dull, some of the stories that have come out of Canadians in War belie that.

?Some people assume the audience is small boys who like to read about things blowing up, big guns and that type of thing, but that is really not the case; they are inspired by the self-sacrifice, the leadership, the bravery and the actual story of the attacks, and so on. The last thing I want to do is glorify war in any way and I don't think I do that. I want people to engage with this part of Canadian history.?

This weekend, Brewster says they have been asked to talk about the Canada 150 commemoration and he has taken this cue to heart.

?I will take [guests] back a century and say while you're sitting in this lovely barn, think back to 100 years to poisoned gas, trenches, and general misery on the front.?

But, he hastens to add with a chuckle, it sounds more uplifting than it is!

For more information in Authors in the Hills of Mulmur, visit headwaters.ca/event/authors-in-the-hills-of-mulmur. Tickets are $35. The event runs from 1 ? 4 p.m.