

READ
LOCAL

the bridge

SHOP
LOCAL

Connecting people, places and ideas across our city from the downtown east

Charles Dickens visits Toronto **3** Bruce Bell
 Moss Park: A love story **5** Dustin Stern
 Fundraising in Covid-19 **8** Jesse Cohoon

page 8

the bridge

december 2020

Fundraising in the wake of Covid-19

Jesse Cohoon

Pivoting to meet the challenge of an ongoing crisis, the Toronto Writers Collective developed a plan to host a virtual fundraiser on November 24. The world had undergone a sea of change, with tradition and norms swept away. So how can we adapt to accommodate this new reality?

Thinking outside the box, Shelley Lepp, Co-Executive Director of the Toronto Writers Collective, and Courtney Greenberg, Outreach and Communication Coordinator, created a virtual online event to entertain and inform.

After a brief overview of the goals and achievements of the TWC, Richard Mozer, the TWC Board Chair, started the program, welcoming more than 75 attendees from all walks of life, including sponsors, donors, friends, facilitators, and writers. Also on hand were special guests Peter Tabuns, MPP Toronto Danforth, and former Lieutenant Governor, David

Onley. Mozer also introduced a video that was recently shown during the 10 days of the Toronto International Festival of Authors at Union Station.

In an effort to engage the audience and share the vision of the organization, Al Moritz – a staunch ally of TWC and Toronto's Poet Laureate – stepped forward to present a powerful keynote speech and to read several of his poems, showing his passion for empowering the voices of people who have traditionally been silenced.

"When I became Poet Laureate, one of the things I specifically wanted to do was to reach out to the poor; not to bring poetry to them, but to find their poetry, to hear them, and to learn from them," said Moritz. "It is not easy to find ways to access and to create communion. I was astonished to find the Toronto Writers Collective was already doing everything I wanted to do. I am grateful to be a part of this effort."

Other stars of the evening were emerging authors Lisa

Kaitell, Maria Cristina Sabourin-Jovel, Janel Coe, and Shirin Tobie-Paul. Several of them read new pieces published in *Front Lines: Until the Words Run Pure* and *Front Lines: Bent, Not Broken*, a collection of anthologies released during the Toronto International Festival of Authors. Lisa Richter also shared a striking poem – *The Primeval Murderess Talks Back to the Poet* – from her recently published collection, *Nautilus and Bone* (Frontenac House).

There is a depth of understanding that comes from lived experience – an understanding that permeates each

line. Jay Teitel, a well-known writer and editor, has mentored many of those featured in the event. He said, "I found the writers remarkably receptive and open to suggestions. They seemed to have a built-in sense of humility about the work that they were creating. The work was more important than they were."

He quoted Roberta Taylor's poem, *A Plea*:

Give me a true friend with human soul

who knows the fallings and the climbs as I.

Who knows what it is like to be made whole.

To sing and cry and laugh,

and laugh and cry.

The final presenter of the evening was Jobim Novak, who read from his autobiography that tells his journey from addiction to advocate; from despair to hope. It was a tribute to his own resilience and the value of expressive writing to growth and self-awareness.

Susan Turk, Founder of the TWC, noted about the event, "The stories shared illuminate the experiences that fill our diverse, vibrant, and changing city. Many of the writers come from tough experiences and difficult realities. They choose to write and reject silence. Simple, yet profound, our ability to create words is a gift for both those who create and those who receive that creation."

The beauty of an online event is that it gives people from all walks of life the opportunity to share their stories and to create community. Social distancing doesn't have to mean social isolation. The stories shared were touching, heart-warming and heart-breaking. Perceptions were challenged, the beauty of the spoken word resonated, and a goal was achieved: through writing and listening, together we change the world.