



PEN Canada 2008/09 Annual Report

PEN Canada is a non-profit literary and human rights organization that works on behalf of the right to freedom of expression. We assist imprisoned or otherwise persecuted writers internationally through campaigns combining public awareness and quiet diplomacy. We also work to ensure that those responsible for the deaths of writers are brought to justice. At home, we provide opportunities for writers in exile to find a place within Canadian society and monitor issues of censorship. PEN Canada is a registered charity.

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As the title of this annual report suggests, in its 25 years of advocacy PEN Canada has been many things to many people, some of whom share their stories here.

Some are stories with happy endings like those of Martha Kumsa, our first released prisoner to find a new home in Canada, or of Jiang Weiping, the most recent. Other stories, like Ken Saro-Wiwa's, ended in tragedy. Jalal Barzanji is one of many who have been helped to find community here in Canada. Juliet O'Neill and Deborah Ellis found that PEN had their backs when their rights were threatened by forces here at home. Each has a different view on what "My PEN" means, but the common thread is that lives were changed: both those whom PEN Canada helped, and those who were the helpers.

We hope these stories will give you, our members and supporters, an opportunity to contemplate the ways in which this tiny organization has changed the world, one small step at a time. The tougher the times, the more we are needed.

"My PEN" is your PEN. And our PEN, together.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The first time I heard of PEN Canada was when it protested the imprisonment of Akbar Ganji, the Iranian journalist jailed for his criticism of the government. I had met Ganji on one of my trips to Iran and knew of his work. But it was through the work of PEN Canada that I learned about his fate in prison, his two-month hunger strike in 2005, and his subsequent release. PEN Canada played a crucial role in publicizing Ganji's case and lobbied to get him out of jail. As I soon discovered, Ganji was one of the more than 30 honorary members that this organization fought for.

It was then that I joined PEN as a member – and later accepted to head the organization – because there is something different about the way PEN works. It is a small organization with a focus on freedom of expression – our essential right to think, and speak, freely. The success of PEN is, in part, due to the lack of bureaucratic wrangling. There are three specific programs of Writers in Prison, National Affairs, and Writers in Exile, each operating with the help of a staff coordinator and a volunteer board member who acts as the chair of the committee of the same name. This allows direct involvement with the case of each writer or journalist.

During my first year as the President, I revised what was called the “minders” program, through which a board member adopts the case of one writer in prison and lobbies for their release. Believing that one must lead by example, I adopted the case of Sayed Parwez Kambakhsh. He is the 23-year-old Afghan journalism student who was sentenced to death without a trial for allegedly downloading and forwarding an article that was considered blasphemous by the religious authorities of his northern town of Mazar-e-Sharif.

PEN Canada passed a resolution at the Annual General Meeting calling on other PEN centres to launch a campaign on Kambakhsh's behalf. The widespread media interest in him helped in the initial stages of the campaign and PEN Canada's office pursued the case. Shortly after the AGM, I started communicating directly with his family in Afghanistan and contacted various government ministers and officials in Canada about his situation. Due to pressure by International PEN, our individual efforts at PEN Canada and by Canadian diplomats on the

ground, the Afghan authorities were forced to hold a trial, and the death sentence was reduced to a 20-year prison term. It seemed a “disappointment” to most, but some of us saw this as an opportunity – a possibility to exert more pressure on the Afghan government through closed-door diplomacy.

While international pressure continued, I kept in contact with Kambakhsh’s family, offering them support and my personal promise that PEN Canada was on the case. I met with Canadian politicians and diplomats in my three trips to Kabul within six months.

It is easy to get carried away with demands, being pulled in different directions, and the natural desire to do more than one person can or a single organization’s capacity can allow. But the case of Kambakhsh taught me that it is possible to help one writer in prison or one person in distress at a time by concentrating one’s energy and time. Despite limited resources and a small budget, an organization like PEN can achieve its goal of helping writers and journalists through clarity of purpose and hard work. And the commitment of individuals to freedom of expression as a personal responsibility can both inspire and enable others to act.

We all recognize the moral obligation to speak up against injustice, especially in a world that is more and more subject to censorship, self-censorship and pressures from political and religious lobby groups to silence or marginalize those who do not subscribe to their particular narrative of history or accounts of current events. Ganji, Kambakhsh, and 30 more PEN honorary members are just a few examples. But there are many other challenges facing us today. Here at home, “multiculturalism” has become an escape term for those groups who wish to discourage any form of critical thinking or its expression; equally the “right to free expression” is abused by those who think “freedom of expression” is a disposable commodity that can be put to use when serving their agendas and denied when it works against them. How can one navigate through these complexities and barriers? For me, it is about personal resistance to injustice. We can only rely on systems like democracy and civil society when we as individuals have fulfilled our duty of being aware and our collective responsibility of joining forces to ensure our basic rights are guaranteed.

I encourage others to see beyond the challenges, to the realm of possibilities where each person can do something to make a difference. We often hear about various writers and their stories – small acts such as writing a poem or an article that led to years in prison or even death sentences. But there is nothing like talking to the family members or hearing from the person in prison about how difficult it is to be held behind bars for expressing their thoughts. It breaks down the ambiguous, often distant, human misery into real information, small details and tangible understanding of an individual’s desperation. It makes it impossible to remain indifferent, or refuse to act. PEN Canada has set the path. All it takes for us is to be aware and get involved – even if it means one case at a time.

article



Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Last October 2008, marking twenty years to the month of his first arrest as a student in 1988, PEN Canada gave the satirist Zargana of Myanmar (formerly Burma) its One Humanity Award for his work that “has transcended the boundaries of national divides and inspired connections across cultures.”

When I started work with PEN Canada in 1992, Zargana was one of our Honorary Members on whose behalf we sent appeals. Known as the “wise clown,” he had been arrested in 1990 at a stadium in Rangoon for mimicking the head of state. During the period of the 1988 uprising in Burma, Zargana was second only to opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in drawing crowds. For his jokes, he was first imprisoned, from October 1988 to April 1989, and badly tortured. Nevertheless, he managed to scratch poems on the floor of his cell with a broken shard of pottery, then memorized them to write them down later when he was free – reading, writing, paper and pens were banned from the prison.

My PEN is tenacious. Our work to seek improvement in a prisoner’s situation or the resolution of a complex case most often takes a painstakingly long time – but, always, we stay the course. Zargana is a case in point.

Zargana spent the next two decades in and out of jail for criticizing the special privileges of the authorities, the poverty and problems faced by the poor and the farmers, spiraling prices, the incompetence of government departments, bribery and corruption, and General Ne Win’s dictatorship.

In 1996, after speaking out against censorship to a foreign journalist, he was banned from performing his work altogether, and stripped of his freedom to write and publish. He continued to defy the authorities and spread his jokes by word of mouth, until his arrest in 2007, for supporting the monks in the Rangoon protests.

NEXT PLEASE
they may greet you
with applause
but don't get ideas.
show's over boys
prepare to step down.

BURMESE COMEDIAN ZARGANA - OCTOBER 15, 1988
RECIPIENT OF PEN CANADA'S 2008 HUMANITY AWARD.

On June 4, 2008, Zargana was once again arrested. When Cyclone Nargis had hit the previous month, Zargana mobilized more than 400 entertainers to deliver aid. Their efforts, which they funded themselves, began just five days after the storm and reached people in the hardest hit villages, few of whom had received sufficient aid from the government.

As they delivered supplies, Zargana gave several interviews about his work and the needs of the people, and ridiculed state media reports about the government's relief efforts. For this, Zargana was charged with seven offences, detained in Insein prison, and sentenced to a shocking 59 years.

In February this year, his sentence was reduced to 35 years and Zargana was moved to a prison in northern Myanmar, far from his family. In April we received notice of Zargana's transfer to a hospital that did not have the medicine he needs. Zargana has been in and out of inhumane jails for twenty years, and now his health is failing before he even turns 50.

While it has proven impossible to move the regime in Myanmar to cease repression of the right of its people to freedom of expression – Myanmar's dictatorship is one of the most authoritarian in the world – PEN Canada will persist in advocating for Zargana's release, for Aung San Suu Kyi, the rightful leader of the opposition, still under house arrest, and nearly a dozen other writers in prison in Burma today.

Another example of this tenacity is our work on the case of our Honorary Member Jiang Weiping, the Chinese journalist who spent six years in prison for reporting on official corruption. We campaigned intensively for several years – up to the highest levels in Canada and China – summoning all the help we could. When Jiang was released a year early from prison in 2006 we were overjoyed at the prospect of his being reunited with his family in Canada. It was not to be, however, as the Chinese government then denied him his civil and political right to hold a passport or leave the country during the following three years. In February we finally welcomed him to Canada.

My PEN is steadfast. It is the least we can do to try to help our Honorary Members, such as the 23-year old Afghan journalist Sayed Parwez Kambakhsh, sentenced to an appalling twenty years in prison this year for distributing an article about women's rights deemed "anti-Islamic" by the authorities.

We work in the abstract, for the most part, not having met the writer on whose behalf we are advocating. However, we establish an intimate relationship with the writer, even if often the writer has no idea we are – or that indeed anyone is – involved in helping. We seek details about family, work, mental and physical state, all the while investigating political or any other promising leverage. In turn, and unbeknownst to them, those writers, through their courage in the face of terrible odds, deprivation, sickness and endless frustration, help us to carry on. If and when we do meet, it's often with a certain bittersweet recognition of each other's part in a terrible drama that has, always miraculously it seems, ended well.

Our Honorary Members are the inspiration for PEN's work, and like them, my PEN is resilient in the face of adversity. When the economic downturn began to have an impact last fall – in the form of fewer donations – we knew we were going to be sorely tested. The board led an appeal to our members, past presidents, board members and patrons that yielded \$75,000. The fundraising committee began working overtime. The full-time staff accepted a four-month salary cut of 20%. We cut some other costs. We have seen a little budgetary bounce-back as a result, but there is much, much more to do.

As I write this, we await possible news of another prisoner release that has got us on tenterhooks. By the time you read this, we may again have succeeded, after much effort, in freeing a writer from a lengthy prison sentence in a forbidding political landscape. We do this because PEN believes that the right to freedom of expression – to independent thought – is essential to an open and just civil society, and that every citizen deserves that right.

There are many more battles to be fought. The notion of religious defamation as a human rights violation is gaining ground in many countries; we must be on our guard, ready to combat this undermining trend against freedom of expression internationally. There are encouraging signs here at home that our work is having a positive impact – see Brendan de Caires' National Affairs Report (page 42) for an account of our recent successes – but we will remain on watch.

The work we do is advanced by PEN Canada's growing international responsibility, as evidenced by the recent election of Margaret Atwood as an International PEN Vice President (joining J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Toni Morrison and others holding that title), by former PEN Canada president Haroon Siddiqui's role on the Board of International PEN; and, most recently, the election in Oslo of past president Marian Botsford Fraser to the Chair of the International PEN Writers in Prison Committee. In addition, past president John Ralston Saul will be proposed by PEN Canada and other centres to stand for election to the position of International PEN president, to be decided in October at the PEN Congress in Austria. We are pleased to contribute a Canadian perspective and to benefit from the presence of an International PEN representative in our campaigns and fundraising efforts.

My PEN is grateful. We can't do this alone; in addition to relying on PEN centres, non-governmental organizations, international institutions, governments with whom we work, the members who send appeals, and the donors who support us, we look to the Honorary Members for motivation and courage in all we do.

Thanks to Nelofer Pazira for her activist's mind; to the board for its commitment; to our members, patrons, donors, sponsors and volunteers for their generous support; to staff Nancy Granda and Brendan de Caires for their loyalty and hard work; and to Josh Bloch, Kendra Ward and the entire TAXI crew for bringing a great play to life.

Finally, I would like to thank Jim Ryce, Gary Beelik and their colleagues at Soapbox Design. For the past 10 years, they have dedicated their talents to our needs. Not only do they work *pro bono*, they convince illustrators and suppliers to do the same in order to produce our beautiful annual reports – which regularly capture top design awards – within our extremely modest budget.

KEN SARO-WIWA

**a life
changing
letter
from
PEN.**



MY PEN

GERALD OHLSEN ON HIS FIGHT FOR THE LIFE OF KEN SARO-WIWA

What is happening in Ogoni? Pollution? Violence? Genocide? Separatism?

Such were the questions in a fateful telex from Ottawa, asking the High Commission in Lagos how to respond to a letter from PEN Canada. PEN wanted action with respect to environmental degradation in the Ogoni region of the Niger Delta. According to PEN, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, led by writer and businessman Ken Saro-Wiwa, was alleging genocide as a result of pollution that poisoned their air, land and water sources. Shell and the Nigerian government were blamed.

In early 1993 Nigeria, communal strife was rampant; human rights were endlessly abused; an election to end military rule was in the works. Trade and investment were growing. In this context, the situation of 300,000 Ogoni in a country of 110 million, was not the High Commission's highest priority. The answers to Ottawa's questions did not fall trippingly from the pen. Finding them fell trippingly to me, as senior political officer.

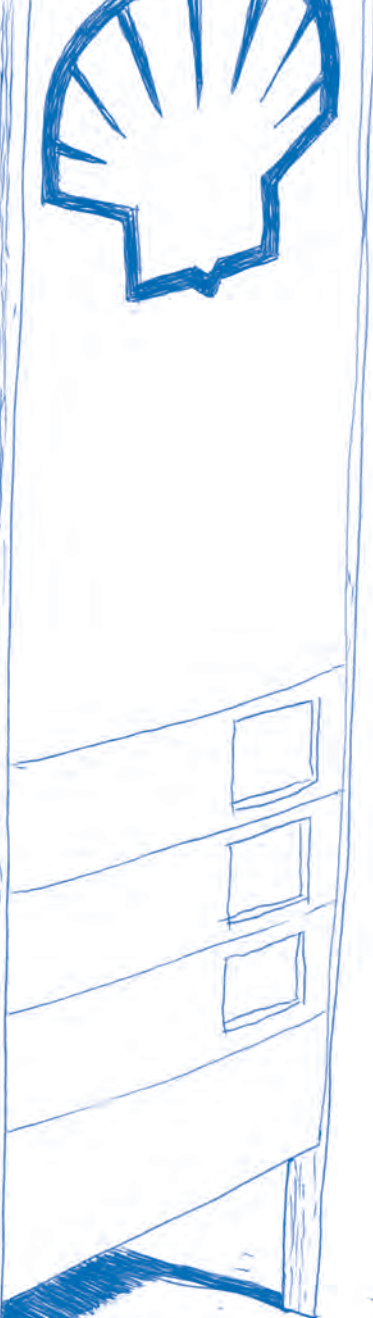
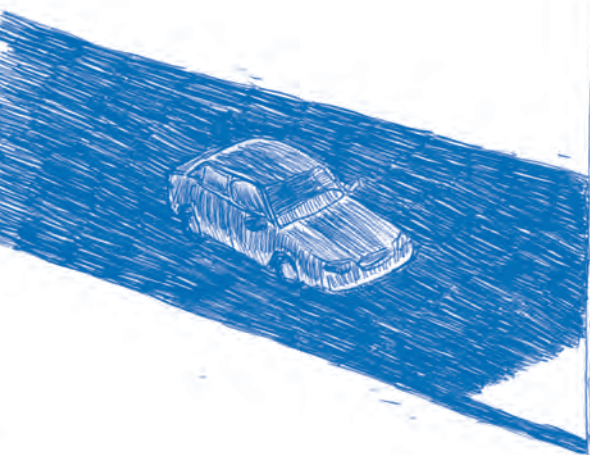
Yes, there had been violence against property. Yes, the environmental damage was appalling. No, there was no genocide. No, MOSOP was not separatist.

Getting to those answers changed my life. My wife and I met Ken, became friends, and later mourned his loss. We visited Ogoni, saw the flares, climbed over the pipeline fences and walked on the dried up oil spills ten metres deep. Ken's brother Owens and sister-in-law Diana became life-long friends. We returned twice to Ogoni to bear witness to the effects of state terrorism on a people who killed not a single official and to the sham trial that led to Ken's "judicial murder." For the richness of friendship, experience and humility brought by that first telex, I will always be grateful to PEN.

More importantly, that PEN letter, and those that followed, had a much broader impact on Canada, and, I think, on Nigeria itself. Had PEN not forced us in government to pay attention, real attention, to the situation in Ogoni before it became a cause célèbre, it is very unlikely that we would have come to understand it as we did. It is unlikely that Canada would have assumed early and active leadership in the Commonwealth and United Nations on the issues of democracy, human rights and the end of military rule. Without that leadership, at the highest levels, I doubt whether the world would have applied the carefully targeted sanctions that lead, quite directly, to the fall of the Abacha regime and the election of a civilian government. Nigeria would be the poorer for it.

PEN was not alone in this but it was an essential catalyst. To what more could one small group of very special people aspire?

a
father's
small
request



KEN WIWA

ON HIS PATH TO ACTIVISM

Everything, it seems, flows from the pen. From the first letter that my father wrote to his local paper protesting the effects of oil exploration in Ogoni in 1958, to that letter from his detention cell in April 1995, gently coaxing me into understanding that it would be a good idea to fly to Toronto to represent him at a PEN benefit.

I am not sure if I ever told him that that same weekend was the weekend I was scheduled to celebrate my engagement. Back then my private concerns seemed set on a collision course with his political affairs.

My political life was underway – under very different circumstances from my father’s but if the pen provided the ink, the PEN was the link that connected a son to his father and much else besides. Because it was over that long weekend in Canada that I acquired my sea legs as a political activist.

Even as I read an excerpt from Nadine Gordimer’s *Burgher’s Daughter* at the PEN Canada benefit, my reading of the existentialist angst of an anti-apartheid activist’s daughter met with gasps of empathy but as I looked out over the sea of faces in the packed auditorium it did occur to me that for all my anxieties of taking on the burden of my father’s labours those chores did come with an invitation, as he had promised, to rub minds and shoulders with the “good and great.”

Beyond the spotlights was the humbling appreciation of the nuts and bolts of campaigning to get an issue from the fringes of public concern to the front and centre of political debate. From the meetings with Nigerian pro-democracy activists at the PEN offices in Toronto, to an editorial meeting at the *Globe and Mail*, followed by a flight from the Island airport to Ottawa where I spent a few precious hours lobbying Canadian government officials at Foreign Affairs.

I remember that my father was suitably impressed by my report of the trip. I was impressed that he was impressed but what I didn’t tell him was that I had Isobel Harry and Lesley Krueger on hand to give voice to my unspoken thoughts.

Having said that I probably should have spoken up more forcefully when on the drive from Ottawa to Montreal the Canadian government official decided to refuel at a Shell gas station.

If nothing else there has always been plenty light relief and irony on this journey.

Like the epic cold snap that rolled in across Quebec as we entered Montreal. In the space of one day, plus 22 degrees in Toronto suddenly became minus something unfathomable in Montreal. I looked out the window in shock as my flight back to London took off in a blizzard. I think I quietly crossed off Canada as a place I’d ever wish to live.

Of course I came back. And even brought my young family with me, introducing them over the next six years to our extended family of Canadian poets, essayists and novelists.

There are so many footnotes to this story so many people who worked to raise awareness of Ken Saro-Wiwa's case, mobilising the support of the Canadian people and government in the process. I think, primarily, of how former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien who was moved to speak out against the Nigerian military regime a few months later at the Commonwealth Conference in Auckland.

Even though that chapter ended with the executions of my father along with eight of our Ogoni kinsmen, new chapters in the narrative are still being written, even as I write. The story has moved to a courtroom in New York where Shell is standing trial for aiding and abetting the violation of his human rights. There is a dizzying narrative sweep to this story – from the pen of a 17 year old in rural Nigeria in the 1950s to a court room in Manhattan in 2009, sweeping up Generals, Prime Ministers, poets, errant sons and multinationals in its global swirl.

Who knows how the story will end when the dust settles? As Ben Okri once wrote there is a “sly and incontrovertible logic” with which stories reveal themselves but at the full and final reckoning I have no doubt that the pen and the PEN will, once again, be vindicated.

WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE REPORT

Undoubtedly, the climax of the year for the Writers in Prison Committee came in early February, when Jiang Weiping, the until recently incarcerated Chinese journalist and poet, stepped down from the airplane at Toronto airport. Jiang is a very special immigrant in PEN's heart; he had been an Honorary Member since 2003. Now he had gained release and, with PEN at his back, been reunited with his family who had come on ahead of him. At that moment we all could feel, well, joyful and justified.

Honorary Membership is the device by which PEN Canada focuses the attention and literary resources of its members on fellow writers who, having publicly exercised freedom of expression are subsequently jailed or awaiting trial and sentencing. Once a prisoner becomes an honorary member, PEN Canada's members are invited to protest in writing, again by freely expressing their indignation. Our roster of honoraries stands at thirty, which is the ceiling PEN Canada's structure and staffing can handle effectively. Looking now down the list, which of course it is our constant aim to shorten, I see eleven countries cited, from Afghanistan to Vietnam. Within the prisons of those countries, or in the case of Aung San Suu Kyi house arrest, are, for example, nine Eritrean journalists whose fates are a mystery. There are also two murdered women journalists: the Iranian-Canadian Zahra Kazemi and the Russian Anna Politkovskaya. The truth of their deaths remains unrevealed.

Two episodes sit especially heavy on the list, though all are wounds of equal depth against freedom of expression: I refer to the stories of the Burmese poet and comedian Zargana, and the Afghan journalism student Sayed Parwez Kambakhsh. The former is now just at the beginning of a 35-year sentence for spirited, repeated acts of defiance and compassion against an impervious junta, and the latter, a citizen of a country whose freedoms, we are repeatedly told, young Canadians are dying to defend, is serving a 20-year sentence for the distribution of a single article. These wrongs should be righted.

Adding light to the darkness, it is with further joy that I can report the release, since last June, of two honorary members. Hu Shigen, the Chinese university lecturer, political activist and dissident writer, arrested in 1992 and charged with so-called counter-revolutionary crimes, was released on August 26, 2008 after serving 16 years of a 20-year jail sentence. He is still deprived of his political rights and not allowed to speak to the media.

And on February 10 of this year, the Uighur historian and writer Tohti Tunyaz was released from Prison No. 3 after 11 years in captivity for supposedly stealing state secrets and inciting national disunity. The language describing the crimes these men were charged with will be familiar to anyone who has read Orwell.

The persecutors of writers, bloggers and journalists in so many countries do not rest, although they do accelerate or slow down in exercising their cruelty and fear, sadly, more often the former. The persecution often increases as politicians or soldiers become leaders, and leaders become addicted to power or the imposition of a belief system. When such an acceleration is perceived, campaigns are mounted within PEN to apply extra imaginative monitoring, extra-governmental diplomacy and pressure to bear. Three such campaigns appeared on the PEN calendar in the last year. The China Olympics campaign, raised to attempt to hold the Chinese totalitarians to their human rights promises (which turned out to be an Olympic-sized lie – six of our honorary members are in Chinese prisons) was fought long and well, and continues. The Turkish campaign, launched in the wake of the assassination of Hrant Dink, is ongoing and I was privileged to speak on behalf of PEN at a commemorative evening held on the anniversary of his death at the National Library in Ottawa. The Freedom to Write in the Americas campaign, now half a year old, will focus International PEN's attention to the south, where I fear most of all for my fellow freedom expressers in Mexico, a country with which we have a free trade agreement and where impunity is taken for granted. I was again fortunate to be able to meet and link hands with several brave Venezuelans on a visit to Ottawa.

The *raison d'être* of PEN, as I see it, is to counter impunity, the self-forgiveness by which oppressors order imprisonment or murder without fear of consequence. By letting them know that we know what they have done, and by seeking to reverse it. In other words to suggest compassion as the equal of torture in matters of governance, we hope to undo their sins. The mechanism for this is the Rapid Action Network, the appeals to authority home and abroad made mostly by email. The committee is anxious to improve the effectiveness of this form of protest, by reverting to something tangible, such as postcards, that outweigh the easily discarded, virtual email, and to allow PEN's members, who live by their wits, to be creative in their statements of protest.

The heart of PEN's mission, I believe, lies in the Advocates program, which at PEN Canada formerly went by the name of the Minders program. Here, a member of PEN voluntarily embraces the welfare and advocacy for the eventual release of a particular honorary member. Or so the theory goes, but it is fair to say that in practice this can take years and perhaps may never happen. And yet it is always worth introducing evidence of caring in the world, and the Advocates' program will receive more care and attention in the months to come, I promise, as we remodel it. Here I wish to mention the fine work of Ms. Kukar, an intern who unearthed and reported on the somewhat dusty state of the Minders program, PEN member Mark Frutkin, who is the model for an advocate from which we are working to rebuild, and Brendan de Caires, programs co-ordinator at PEN Canada who has a talent for putting philosophy into practice that will benefit the committee's work in the future.

The Writers in Prison Committee was pleased to swell in number from one to two in the last year with the addition of Kevin Dooley, a gentleman of Irish inclination who lives in Ottawa, as I do, and has already worked hard on our behalf at festivals and readings. Also a pilot scheme in Ottawa, whereby someone from the committee goes into writing programs at colleges and universities and spreads the word and hopefully increases membership has had some results and will soon be replicated elsewhere.

A year from now, my hopes for the Writers in Prison Committee are: that the committee itself enjoys a growth spurt, and that a pan-Canadian membership of that committee emerges; that the Advocate's program returns from its nadir to the side of the angels; and that through the invigorated Rapid Action Network our honorary members gain at least comfort and at most release. I welcome, at any time, counsel, advice and any good ideas from you through the PEN website. Every word shared is the antidote to every word silenced.



HON- ORARY MEM- BERS

AFGHANISTAN

Sayed Parwez Kambakhsh, a 24-year-old journalism student in Afghanistan, was arrested for blasphemy in October 2007 after circulating an article from a Farsi website which questioned the Prophet Mohamed's views on the role of women in Islamic societies. On January 22, 2008, at a closed hearing with no legal representation, Kambakhsh was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death. His trial lasted less than ten minutes. In October 2008 a higher court in Kabul commuted the sentence to 20 years in prison for "questioning Islam." Kambakhsh's lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court of Afghanistan but the sentence was confirmed at a closed hearing in February 2009.

CANADA

The Canadian/Iranian photojournalist **Zahra Kazemi** was murdered in Tehran in July 2003 after being jailed for photographing a student protest outside Evin prison. Kazemi's body was buried in Shiraz, southern Iran, on July 22, 2003, contrary to the wishes of her son, Stéphane Hachemi. In April 2007, a former Iranian military doctor revealed that he had treated Kazemi for injuries consistent with torture. In November Iran's Supreme Court ordered a new investigation into her death. (The Iranian government had previously claimed that her death was an accident, despite evidence that she was brutally tortured and possibly even raped while in custody.) Her family was reportedly "very skeptical" about the prospects of the new investigation. To date, nobody in Iran has been brought to justice for Kazemi's murder. A show trial in 2004 ended with the acquittal of an Iranian security agent.

CHINA AND AUTONOMOUS REGIONS

Hada, a writer and activist for Mongolian rights, is three years away from completing a 15-year prison sentence and four years' deprivation of political rights for "separatism" and "espionage." In 1992 he was a founding member of the Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance (SMDA), for the peaceful promotion of Mongolian culture and human rights. The Chinese authorities reportedly believed that the group's underground journal threatened "national unity" and were further provoked when Hada published a book that recounted government campaigns to suppress Mongolian culture through mass killings and political repression. Human Rights in China reports that Hada has been routinely mistreated in prison, placed in solitary confinement and handcuffed overnight to a metal "shackle board" for "resisting reform." Other reports indicate that he has been denied proper medical care for a stomach ulcer and coronary heart disease, prevented from talking to other inmates, and allowed only limited contact with his family.

Li Zhi, a blogger and financial official in the Dazhou municipal government, was arrested in August 2003 by provincial State Security Police after he accused Sichuan officials of corruption. Since Zhi's article was posted on an overseas website he was charged on September 3 with "conspiracy to subvert state power" for contact with foreign-based dissidents. On December 10, he was sentenced to eight years in prison. The sentence was upheld on appeal on February 26, 2004. Li is thought to be suffering from a worsening Hepatitis B condition. The court verdict confirms that both Yahoo! and Sina Beijing supplied evidence to the prosecution. In November 2008 it was reported that his sentence had been reduced by one year, and that a further reduction was expected in 2009.

HONORARY MEMBERS

Shi Tao, a freelance writer and head of the news division at Dangdai Shangbao (Contemporary Trade News) in Hunan, was charged in November 2004 with “illegally divulging state secrets abroad” after emailing details of the propaganda ministry’s list of prohibited subjects to foreign media contacts. The Chinese authorities seized Shi’s computer and private documents and warned his family to keep quiet about the matter. On April 30, 2005, the Changsha Intermediate People’s Court sentenced Shi to ten years in prison and the sentence was upheld at an appeal in June. Shi’s mother has applied for a review of the appeal on procedural grounds. Court documents showed that a Hong Kong subsidiary of Yahoo! provided the Chinese police with information used to link Shi’s computer to the allegedly classified email. (In November 2007, at a US congressional hearing, two of Yahoo’s senior executives apologized to Shi Tao’s mother, but did not confirm that their company would reject future requests for similar information on political dissidents.) Shi’s mother and lawyer report that his access to reading material has been restricted, and that his health has deteriorated because of forced prison labour.

Tohti Tunyaz, an ethnic Uighur historian and writer, was released from prison on February 10, 2009 after completing an 11-year sentence for “inciting national disunity” and “stealing state secrets for foreign persons.” Tohti was arrested in February 1998, while researching a doctoral thesis on Uighur history in Urumchi, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. The charges against him were thought to be linked to his accounts of Uighur attempts to achieve ethnic separation. The Chinese authorities claimed Tohti had incited Uighur separatism in *The Inside Story of the Silk Road*, published in Japan in 1998, but no such book appears to exist.

Yang Tongyan, a freelance writer and member of the Independent Chinese Pen Centre (ICPC) was convicted of subversion in a three-hour closed trial on May 16, 2006. In its verdict the Zhenjiang Intermediate Court in Jiangsu province cited evidence that Yang had posted anti-government articles on the Internet, organized branches of the outlawed China Democracy Party, and accepted illegal funds from foreign sources. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison and four years’ deprivation of political rights. Yang has often criticised the Chinese government in articles published in the *Epoch Times* and at websites like *Boxun.com*. Between 1990 and 2000 he was jailed on counter-revolution charges because of his involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. His previous conviction may have contributed to the severity of his current sentence. He was also previously held incommunicado from December 24, 2004 – January 25, 2005.

Uighur writer **Nuremuhamet Yasin** was sentenced in November 2004 during a closed trial with no legal representation to ten years in prison for “inciting Uighur separatism” in a short story published in a literary journal. Korash Huseyin, chief editor of the Kashgar Literary Journal, was also given a three-year prison sentence. *Wild Pigeon*, the story in question, is a first-person narrative of a young pigeon who is caught and caged by humans while trying to find a new home for his flock. Rather than sacrifice his freedom, the pigeon kills himself by swallowing a poisonous strawberry, as Yasin’s own father had done in similar circumstances years earlier. Yasin has been permitted no visitors since his arrest and there are serious concerns for his well-being. Korash Huseyin was released from prison in February 2008.

In 2004, **Zheng Yichun**, poet, essayist and Professor of English at the University of Liaoning, was arrested by the security services in Yingkou, Liaoning Province on “suspicion of inciting subversion of state power.” The prosecutor cited as evidence 63 signed articles that had appeared on *dajiyuan.com*, a website popular among China’s intelligentsia. The essays were among 300 articles confiscated from Professor Zheng’s home after his arrest. Zheng is an outspoken critic of the government: one of his essays calls China’s one-party system “the root of all evil,” and the title of his 2002 self-published book of poems is *The Era of Brainwashing*. On April 26, 2005, at a trial attended by senior authorities from Liaoning Province, Zheng pleaded guilty. Even though his lawyer argued that he was protected by Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution, which guarantees freedom of the press, Zheng was convicted in July 2005 and later sentenced to seven years in prison. Zheng suffers from diabetes and his health has deteriorated since his arrest. In May 2008 there were reports that he had suffered cerebral thrombosis, which caused paralysis in part of his face and constrained movement in his right arm. He was sent to a hospital outside the prison, but was returned after doctors decided that his condition was not serious. The prison Zheng is currently being held in does not have the medical facilities necessary to treat his condition and his relatives have asked for his release on medical grounds.

ERITREA

Thirteen Eritrean journalists were detained in September 2001, shortly after President Issaias Afewerki took the decision to close all of the country’s private newspapers, leaving only the state-run *Hadas Eritrea*. Nine of those journalists are Honorary Members of PEN Canada: **Yusuf Mohamed Ali** (editor-in-chief, *Tsigenay*), **Matthewos Habteab** (editor-in-chief,

Meqaleh), **Dawit Habtemichael** (reporter, *Meqaleh*), **Medhanie Haile** (editor-in-chief, *Keste Debena*), **Emanuel Asrat** (*Zemen*), **Temesken Ghebreyesus** (*Keste Debena*), **Dawit Isaac** (co-owner of *Setit*, writer), **Fesshaye Yohannes** “Joshua” (publisher, *Setit*, playwright and poet), **Said Abdelkader** (writer and editor, *Admas*, and owner of the press that printed most of the independent newspapers). The following are now believed dead: **Yusuf Mohamed Ali** (June 2006), **Medhanie Haile**, **Fesshaye Yohannes** (January 2007), and **Said Abdelkader** (March 2005). In January 2009 the website Eritrea Watch reported that Dawit Isaac, who is also a Swedish citizen, had been moved with more than a hundred other political prisoners to a maximum-security prison in Embatkala, 20 miles northeast of the capital Asmara. In March more than 250 Swedish MPs wrote directly to the Eritrean government to ask for Dawit Isaac’s release.

IRAN

Journalist and film critic **Siamak Pourzand** was abducted by Iranian intelligence on November 24, 2001 and held without charge at an undisclosed location for more than three months. After a secret trial which began in March 2002, Pourzand was given an 11-year prison sentence on April 13, for “undermining state security through his links with monarchists and counter-revolutionaries.” The sentence was confirmed on May 21, 2002, following an appeal by his court-appointed lawyers. Pourzand’s arrest appears to be connected to his position as manager of the *Majmue-ye Farrhangiyeh Honari-ye Tehran*, a cultural centre for writers, artists, and intellectuals. He reportedly admitted to the nine charges against him, and confessed to working for the Shah’s secret service before the revolution and to subsequently making contact with people close to the Shah’s son. It is widely believed

HONORARY MEMBERS

that his confessions were made under duress. After a conditional release in December 2002, Pourzand was re-arrested on March 30, 2003 and jailed after being summoned by the Adareh Amaken, a police unit usually responsible for investigating “moral” offences. Following a series of hospitalisations in 2004, Pourzand was released from prison on medical grounds. However he has reportedly been denied permission to travel abroad for necessary medical treatment and to visit family members who live in the US.

MYANMAR

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Myanmar, has been held under de facto house arrest since May 30, 2003 when she was taken into “protective custody” following violent clashes between opposition and government supporters at a political rally. The ruling junta reported that four people had been killed in the incident but eyewitnesses placed the true figure at more than 60, with many others injured. On May 27, 2008, Suu Kyi’s latest house arrest warrant was extended for another year. As this report went to press she was nearing the end of a trial inside Insein prison on charges of “subversion.” She was arrested on May 14, after an American man swam uninvited to her lakeside residence in Yangon, technically violating a ban on her meeting anyone without official permission. The trial began shortly before the warrant for her house arrest was due to expire. If convicted Suu Kyi could face up to five years in jail. Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1991. She is the author of many books, including *Freedom from Fear*, *Letters from Burma* and *The Voice of Hope*.

Ko Aung Tun, a student activist and writer, was arrested in February 1998 and sentenced in March to 13 years in prison for writing and “illegally distributing” a history of the student movement in Myanmar. Co-author U Myo Htun was reportedly given a seven-year sentence. According to opposition sources, six other people were also arrested in connection with the case and received prison sentences ranging from seven to 10 years for supplying information to Ko Aung Tun. All were reportedly refused access to legal counsel during their trials. While in prison, Ko Aung Tun has reportedly been held incommunicado in solitary confinement and suffered severe beatings which have caused him to vomit blood. He is also said to be suffering from severe asthma and tuberculosis.

Maung Thura (“Zargana”) is currently serving a 35-year sentence following his arrest for leading a private relief effort to deliver aid to victims of Cyclone Nargis which struck on May 2, 2008. The Asian Human Rights Commission reported that Zargana had ridiculed state media accounts of the impact of the cyclone, and the insufficiency of the government’s relief efforts, during interviews with overseas radio stations and other media. In August, Zargana was charged with seven offences under the Criminal Code, the Unlawful Associations Act, the Video Act and sections of the Electronic Act. On November 21, 2008 he was sentenced to 45 years for violating the Electronics Act. Days later, he was given a further 14-year sentence for offences under the criminal code related to his peaceful opposition activities. In 2009 the news agency Mizzima.com reported that on February 13, the Rangoon Division Court reduced the sentence by 24 years, leaving Zargana to serve 35 years in prison. On October 22, 2008, PEN Canada presented our One Humanity Award to Zargana in absentia. He was also awarded the ‘Imprisoned Artist Prize,’ as part of Artventure’s Freedom to Create Prize, on November 26, 2008.

RUSSIA

Anna Politkovskaya, one of the most admired journalists of her generation, was shot dead in the elevator of her Moscow apartment building on October 7, 2006. She had been receiving death threats since 1999, after reporting that Russian forces were committing human rights abuses in Chechnya. The Russian Prosecutor-General announced in May 2008 that the Chechen Rustam Makhmudov had been charged in absentia with Politkovskaya's murder and an international warrant for his arrest was issued. In June the Investigative Committee laid murder charges against three men, a former police officer and two ethnic Chechen brothers. In November, after jurors refused to enter the courtroom in the presence of the media, the judge continued the trial behind closed doors. On February 19, 2009 after a Moscow jury acquitted three suspects of Politkovskaya's murder, a spokesman from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe called the failure to resolve the case "a human rights crisis."

TURKEY

The Turkish editor **Asiye Güzel Zeybek** was arrested in February 1997 during a public protest over allegations that the Turkish government had ties to Mafia groups. Zeybek, editor-in-chief of the radical newspaper *Atilim*, was charged under Article 168 of the Penal Code with having connections to the now-illegal Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, specifically with running and distributing the MLCP journal *İşçinin Yolu* (Worker's Path). The first of a series of trials of the charges against her began in February 2001, four years after her arrest. On October 8, 1997, Zeybek filed a complaint against eight officers of the Anti-Terror Branch of the Istanbul Police for subjecting her to severe torture, including repeated rape, while interrogating her over a period of 13 days. The policemen were brought to trial in November 1998, but the case

was abandoned after the court held that a statute of limitations prevented further legal action. In December 2000, Zeybek was reportedly hit by bullets in her back and leg during a police raid on her prison. She suffered temporary paralysis and has not yet fully recovered from her injuries. Zeybek was freed on June 5, 2002, pending a final court hearing. She was sentenced to 12 years and six months on October 16, 2002. When the sentence was announced, Zeybek was in Sweden to receive the PEN Tucholsky Award, granted annually to writers who have been persecuted, threatened, or in exile. She remains in Sweden and has lodged an appeal against her sentence to the Supreme Court of Turkey.

Ragıp Zarakolu, owner of the *Belge* Publishing House, has been subject to repeated harassment, trials and periods of imprisonment since the 1970s for publishing books that violate Turkey's repressive censorship laws. He is currently being prosecuted for publishing a book which alleges that leading figures in the Ataturk government were responsible for the mass deportation of Armenians in 1915. This claim is an offence under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code which forbids "insulting the State and the memory of Kemal Ataturk." In December 2008, Zarakolu and Cevat Düşün, the chief editor of the *Alternatif* newspaper, were indicted for "making propaganda for a terrorist organisation" (Anti Terror Law 7/2), alienating people from the military (Penal Code Article 318) and praising crime and criminality (Article 215). The charges arose from articles published in *Alternatif* (which Zarakolu owns and edits) in August 2008. One article by a conscientious objector was titled "I Refuse to be a Turkish Soldier," another referred to the PKK as "the organisation fighting for freedom of Kurdish people," and a third suggested that Kurdish guerrilla activities in Turkey might resume "if a political solution fails." Zarakolu received the NOVIB/PEN Free Expression Award in 2003.

HONORARY MEMBERS

TURKMENISTAN

The Turkmen novelist and historian **Rakhim Esenov** was charged with “inciting social, national and religious hatred” following the publication of his novel *Ventsenosny Skitalets* (The Crowned Wanderer; written around 1994, banned from publication in Turkmenistan for about ten years, eventually published in Moscow in 2003). The novel was set in the sixteenth-century Mughal Empire and centered on Bayram Khan, a Turkmen poet, philosopher and army general who saved the empire from dissolution. In February 1997, President Saparmurad Niyazov publicly criticized Esenov’s “historical errors” for his (correct) portrayal of Bayram Khan as a Shia rather than a Sunni Muslim. In February 2004, on his return to Turkmenistan after medical treatment abroad, Esenov, then 76, was interrogated by Ministry of National Security (MNB) officers in the capital Ashgabat. Already in poor health following a heart attack two days prior to his arrest, he suffered a stroke during his detention and was taken to hospital. After further interrogation he was placed in the hospital’s intensive care unit, under the strict control of the MNB. On February 26, Esenov was formally arrested and moved to an MNB prison. He was initially accused of smuggling 800 copies of his novel into Turkmenistan from Russia, but the charges were dropped after Esenov produced evidence that he had paid customs duty for importing the books. In April 2006, Esenov was allowed to leave Turkmenistan to receive the PEN American / Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write award. In February 2008 PEN learned that the case against Esenov had been dropped and that he was allowed to return to Turkmenistan.

UZBEKISTAN

In March 1999 **Muhammad Bekzhon** (“Bekjanov”) was deported from the Ukraine on accusations of involvement in a series of explosions in Tashkent. Several others were arrested in connection with these events, including writer Mamadali Makhmudov and the journalist Yusif Ruzimuradov. Bekjanov’s arrest is thought to be linked to his association with the exiled opposition leader Muhammed Salih (his brother), and to his work for the opposition party’s newspaper *Erk*, which has been banned since 1994. Bekjanov’s co-defendants testified that they were subject to torture during their interrogation including beatings, electric shock and the threat that female family members would be raped. In August 1999, Bekjanov was sentenced to 15 years in prison, for “publishing and distributing a banned newspaper containing slanderous criticism of President Islam Karimov; participating in a banned political protest; and attempting to overthrow the regime.” In 2003 a report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture referred to allegations of torture that had resulted in Bekjanov’s leg being broken and mentioned reports that he had contracted TB while in prison. The government denied that “moral or physical pressure” had been applied but also provided details of Bekjanov’s medical treatment and reduced his sentence by three years. In October 2006, Bekjanov’s wife visited him in prison and reported that he was still suffering beatings, and had lost most of his teeth.

Mamadali Makhmudov, a well-known Uzbek writer and opposition activist was arrested in February 1999 after a series of explosions in Tashkent. It is thought that his arrest is also linked to his association with the exiled opposition leader Muhammed Salih. He was charged with “threatening the president,” “threatening the constitutional order,” “organising banned public associations and religious organisations” and “organising a criminal group.” On August 3, 1999 he was found guilty and sentenced to 14 years. Makhmudov was previously imprisoned between 1994 and 1996 for alleged embezzlement and abuse of office. At the time, these charges were considered by PEN and Amnesty International to have been fabricated in order to persecute Makhmudov for his association with Salih. This view was supported by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary detentions. A successful international campaign was launched and Makhmudov was released early as part of a presidential amnesty. Makhmudov is currently being held at a high security prison in Tashkent. He was hospitalised in July 2000 reportedly for facial and throat surgery made necessary by extreme ill-treatment and neglect during his detention at another prison. His sentence will expire in 2013.

VIETNAM

Le Dinh Nhan, leader of the banned Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), author of books on Buddhism and Oriental philosophy, and a respected religious scholar was arrested on December 29, 1994 for criticizing government policy in an open letter on freedom of speech and religious expression. He was held under “temple arrest” until mid-1995, when he was transferred to an isolated area in Quangai. In February 2003, he was reportedly prevented from travelling to Ho Chi Minh City for urgent surgery to remove a painful growth near his right eye. He was also said to be suffering from high blood pressure, chronic arthritis and stomach ulcers. In March 2003, after being permitted to have surgery in Hanoi, he was visited by diplomats from the European Union and the USA. After meeting Prime Minister Phan Van Khai in April 2004 Le Dinh Nhan was once placed again in total isolation in Nguyen Thieu Pagoda by October, reportedly without access to medical care despite very poor health. He died on July 5, 2008 at the age of 87.



*dangerous
enemies!*

fighting

weiping

MY PEN

ALAN CUMYN ON THE CAMPAIGN TO FREE DISSIDENT CHINESE WRITER JIANG WEIPING

Jiang Weiping, the imprisoned Chinese journalist, first came to my attention in 2003.

It was the end of a long phone conversation with PEN Canada's Executive Director Isobel Harry in which we had, as usual, talked about a variety of cases and issues. She told me she had met an extraordinary woman, Stella Lee, whose husband had been thrown in jail as a result of a series of articles he'd written exposing political corruption in northeastern China. Two of the politicians he had written about had gone to jail – one was even executed for his crimes – but others had simply been angered, and in China's notoriously warped judicial system, Weiping was now suffering the consequences of having made dangerous enemies. It was a case like so many others in the thickening International PEN list: writers in too many countries persecuted for what they had written.

But Jiang Weiping also had a formidable ally in his wife. Stella Lee was a professional translator with strong communication skills and the steely will to fight hard on her husband's behalf over the long haul. Isobel suggested we nominate Jiang Weiping as an Honorary Member, and when I took the idea to the Board they readily agreed. We just had no idea how long a haul it was going to be.

Weiping had already been in prison for three years and was suffering from rheumatic arthritis and atrophic gastritis, serious conditions made worse over the years since Stella had stopped being able to smuggle medicines to him in prison. Stella herself had lost her job as a result of her husband's arrest and later was also briefly detained. Perhaps the hardest decision of her life was to seek refuge in Canada with their daughter Jennifer and thus try to free her husband from a distance rather than staying to fight the battle in China.

One of PEN Canada's first efforts on behalf of Jiang was to assist American PEN in delivering the \$5,000 US from his prestigious Hellman/Hammett award to Stella and Jennifer to help them settle in Toronto. Jiang was quickly the focus of a PEN Canada newsletter and our advocacy also helped see him featured at World Press Freedom Day events in Ottawa and Toronto in May 2004. Later in the year we met with officials from the Human Rights Division of Foreign Affairs in Ottawa to ensure that Jiang Weiping's name and case information were on a crucial list of prisoners of concern that Prime Minister Paul Martin would take to Chinese leaders on his upcoming trip to China. Those prisoner lists had often proved important negotiating tools in the past as the Chinese government periodically released prominent dissidents for "other considerations" in their on-going diplomatic chess game with the West.

But the Chinese government's stance concerning prisoners of conscience hardened in those middle years of Jiang's incarceration. We were not the only organization reporting difficulties getting the Chinese to budge on cases of concern, and Canadian Foreign Affairs officials privately expressed frustration and dismay at the situation. By May of 2005 Jiang was featured as the Empty Chair at the National Press Club's World Press Freedom Day event in Ottawa, and his prison conditions and health were seriously deteriorating. We decided to try a backdoor approach and used a Foreign Affairs contact of former Writers in Prison Committee chair Charlie Foran's to request a high-level meeting between Foreign Affairs representatives, PEN, and Stella Lee, and also to secure a meeting with Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and His Excellency John Ralston Saul. The plan was to get Canadian and Chinese officials at the highest level talking with each other about Jiang Weiping. No one could be more persuasive than Stella, and perhaps nowhere are personal connections more important than in China.

By August 2005 the backdoor, high-level approach was yielding positive results. Jiang's brother and sister-in-law were allowed to visit for the first time in ages and in civilized circumstances: over lunch and not with thick glass separating them. Jiang seemed in good spirits though he was obviously suffering from gastritis. He hoped for release early in the new year. PEN Canada continued to work behind-the-scenes at Foreign Affairs to make sure Jiang's sponsored refugee application would be in place so that he could come to Canada quickly once the opportunity arose. As hoped, Jiang was released in January 2006 having served a six-year sentence. PEN Canada did not comment publicly because intense negotiations were still going on to lobby the Chinese government to allow Jiang to join his family in Canada immediately.

Jiang quickly contacted the Canadian embassy in Beijing but was unable to obtain a passport from his own country. He was still facing the three years of "deprivation of political rights" that was part of his original sentence. Privately, Canadian government officials voiced on-going frustration over the stalemate. PEN Canada's difficult decision was whether to continue trying the quiet, backdoor approach which now appeared to be faltering or to further publicize the case and thus risk antagonizing Chinese officials who might indefinitely block Jiang's access to a passport.

MP Jason Kenney, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's parliamentary secretary who had often worked to further human rights in China, maintained a strong interest in Jiang's case, but as the months went by it became clear that China's position had hardened. In August 2006 Isobel Harry and I discussed the possibility of introducing a human rights prize, the One Humanity Award, which might give the Chinese government a face-saving excuse to grant Jiang a passport to travel to Toronto. Both the Board and the Canadian government were enthusiastic and Jiang was a unanimous choice as first recipient of the award, which grants up to \$5,000 to honour a writer, journalist, academic or PEN Canada Honorary Member outside of Canada whose work has transcended the boundaries of national divides and inspired connections across cultures. The award caused a stir but the Chinese government's hard line remained. Jiang's purgatory was being played out amidst other contentious cases, including that of imprisoned Canadian Huseyin Celil, which were straining Chinese-Canadian relations. We feared that further publicizing Jiang's case might result in a backlash against him; re-arrest seemed a strong possibility even though he was maintaining a low profile.

Finally it appears that the clock, and all those hard-won connections, worked in our favour. When the restrictions on Jiang's political rights were lifted at last in February 2009, the years of lobbying, letter-writing, phone calls, emails and meetings finally paid off. PEN Canada was able to work swiftly and quietly with Canadian government officials to bring Jiang to Toronto to reunite with his family – the resolution we all worked for. What a delight to get the unexpected email after such struggle and frustration: “Jiang Weiping left Beijing at dawn this morning, and should be in Toronto by midnight.”

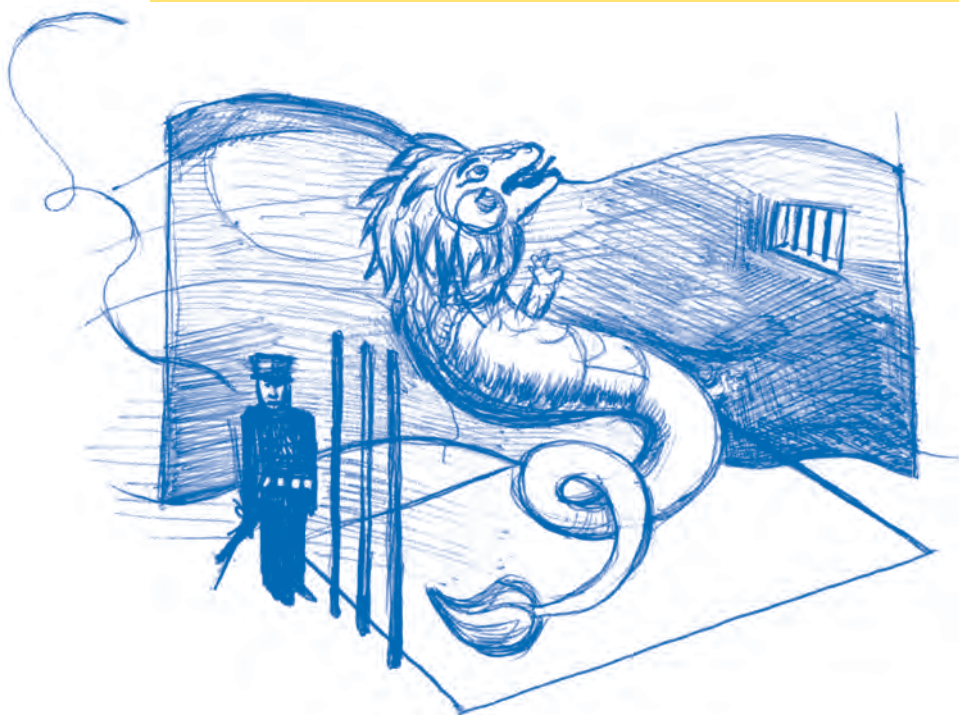
JIANG WEIPING THANKS ALL THOSE WHO HELPED
HIM FIND FREEDOM IN THE WEST

Dear
Friends,

More than a month has passed since I got my real freedom and first reunited with my family after eight years of separation. I feel that I have once again returned to the peaceful life that was taken away from me. Today, when I jog along the quiet park in the early morning or walk along the sunlit street with my wife and daughter, I truly realize that the desperate memory of imprisonment in my mind is blurred and disappearing, just as snow melts under the call of spring. I can leave behind all the hardship and darkness in my life. But I will forever remember and embrace all of you who gave your generous support and encouragement to me and my family during these difficult days. Words themselves are not enough to express my deep appreciation. But I have to say that without you I would never be where I am today.

On behalf of myself and my fellow journalists who are still in prison today, I would like to say a big Thank You to PEN Canada. It is your consistent effort and endless support that give all of us the courage and the confidence to fight for what we believe. Thank you for letting us know that there are many people who stand up for the cause of liberty and justice and who care about the right of free expression as much as we do. In the course of defending our rights, we still have a long journey to go. But I am confident that we will eventually win because none of us is fighting alone.

**Soldier,
I hear you
singing**



A POEM BY JIANG WEIPING



Soldier, I hear you sing
as the gorgeous curtain of night descends
and fireworks explode in the seaside city.
Your song is as freighted and lonely as mine.
Let's thank our messenger—the wind of early spring.

I know that we could only speak with eyes,
feel the same tears, the same choking sobs.
I feel no hatred, nor has it made me mute,
only the impact of our hearts and what we know.
The noise of night is what we share.

Soldier, I hear you sing
in the local accent with public feeling.
Once during days of freedom
my steps broke through thick ice.
I know there's no bullet in your barrel.
I will not escape. I love this wall.

You walk with regular strides,
breaking your notes with your own steps.
Fate punishes all those who think.
Because of the monitor above your head
freedom has been painted blank, a colour heavy
with helpless love and helpless hate.

You repeat the same dull story within your bounds.
How many kindly Chinese it lulls to sleep
who you help, you should know.
I wander within my ten-square-metre cell
but the truth within me has passed beyond these bars.

Soldier, I cherish what you sing
with the sadness and pain inside me.
You tell me that though you walk free within your bounds
your words silenced by storm are my own.
The spring wind blows sand into your eyes.
How cannot your mood have the weight of mine?

Nanguan-ling Prison, New Year's Eve 2004

HONORARY

MEMBERS

RELEASED



HU SHIGEN

Chinese university lecturer, political activist and dissident writer, arrested September 27, 1992 and charged with “counterrevolutionary crimes” for planning June 4 memorial activities in many of China’s major cities. Hu was released on August 26, 2008 after serving 16 years of a 20-year jail sentence. He is still deprived of his political rights and not allowed to speak to the media.

Hu was a founding member of the China Freedom and Democracy Party (CFDP) and China Free Trade Union (CFTU) and has campaigned for government accountability for the violent suppression of the Democracy Movement in June 1989. He was originally sentenced to 20 years in prison and five years’ deprivation of political rights and was held in Beijing No. 2 Prison.

TOHTI TUNYAZ

The Uighur historian and writer Tohti Tunyaz (pen-name: Tohti Muzart) was released on February 10, 2009 from Prison No. 3 in Urumqi, Xinjiang province, after serving an eleven-year prison sentence for “stealing state secrets” and “inciting national disunity.” It is believed that he remains under travel restrictions imposed by the Chinese authorities.

Tohti was arrested on February 6, 1998 while on a research trip in Urumchi, Xinjiang, Uighur Autonomous Region. At the time he was studying for a Ph.D. in Uighur history and ethnic relations at Tokyo University in Japan. The charges against him are thought to be linked to his research, specifically to *The Inside Story of the Silk Road*, a book he allegedly published in 1998. The Chinese government has claimed that the book advocates ethnic separation, but no such book appears to exist.

Tohti was convicted on March 10, 1999 by the Urumqi Intermediate People’s Court and, following an appeal, sentenced by the Supreme Court on 15 February 2000 to a total of eleven years’ imprisonment and two years’ deprivation of political rights.

His wife, who has been living in Japan for many years, recently obtained Japanese citizenship. She has asked the Chinese authorities to permit Tohti to return to Japan for medical treatment and to continue his studies at Tokyo University.

MYANMAR

On September 23, 2008 U Win Tin, Burma’s longest-serving prisoner of conscience was released by the military junta as part of a general amnesty of more than 9,000 prisoners. A former editor of the daily *Hanthawati*, secretary of the executive council of the National League for Democracy, and vice-president of the Burmese Writers’ Association, Win Tin was held in Insein prison for 19 years, much of the time in solitary confinement. A few hours after his release he vowed to “keep fighting until the emergence of democracy in this country.”

Win Tin was arrested on July 4, 1989, accused of “harbouring an offender for whom a warrant had been issued,” allegedly because he had provided shelter to a girl who had had an illegal abortion. The true reason for his arrest is thought to have been his opposition activities. He was also accused of contact with insurgent organizations, obtaining financial assistance from a foreign embassy and acquiring weapons. Sentenced in October 1989 to 3 years with hard labour, he was given an additional 11-year sentence in June 1992 under the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act for reasons that remain unclear, but are thought to be linked to his opposition activities. In March 1996 he was among 21 prisoners tried inside Insein Prison and given additional sentences under the Emergency Provisions Act for circulating a petition, a clandestine magazine and the possession of radio sets.

Win Tin is the recipient of the World Association of Newspapers 2001 Golden Pen of Freedom award and the 2001 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize.

MY PEN

CHRISTOPHER WADDELL STANDING ON GUARD IN CANADA FOR THE RIGHTS OF JULIET O'NEILL

I have known Julie O'Neill for more than 20 years as a competitor and a colleague in the press gallery on Parliament Hill and as soon as I heard that morning in January 2004 that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were raiding her home, I knew that was a move the police would regret. She is a smart, tough and fair journalist who has worked both in Canada and around the world. A raid on her home would be something she wouldn't take easily and shouldn't.

I would never have imagined then that it would take until October 2006 for her finally to escape the cloud of possible prosecution. The most gratifying aspect about the two and a half years that have passed since the Superior Court of Ontario ruled the law used by the RCMP to raid her home was unconstitutional, is that nothing has happened.

The federal government has made no attempt to introduce new legislation to replace the sections the Security of Information Act, passed by Parliament in a rush in the weeks after September 11, 2001 that the court in the O'Neill case ruled violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

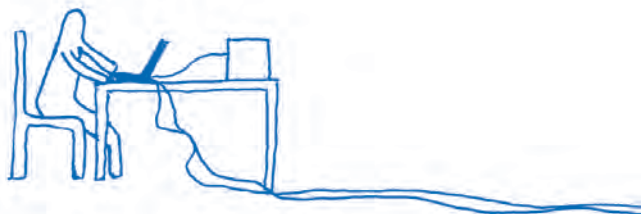
Finally after many attempts to challenge what was originally passed as the Official Secrets Act in 1939, it has been thrown out and Canada has survived just fine.

As National Affairs chair of PEN Canada I helped ensure we were one of many organizations that supported Julie in defending the rights of journalists to protect the identities of confidential sources. We asked regularly why the federal government was proceeding with this costly and pointless attempt at prosecution. Then we joined the cheering when the perseverance and determination she demonstrated throughout was rewarded with a court victory.

Most people think of PEN Canada in connection with supporting those imprisoned around the world for what they write. The O'Neill case demonstrates why we need to be just as vocal and vigilant at home. Speaking out can make a difference and shine a spotlight on those, even in Canada, who wish to restrict or undermine freedom of expression.

The O'Neill decision set an important precedent and afforded a degree of protection from investigation and searches that hadn't existed before. Defending those rights is something that never ends, in everything from speaking out against orders from Quebec courts that ban reporters from covering the sponsorship scandal to participating in the debate about whether pursuing a criminal investigation should supersede the right to protect confidential sources. It is just as important a part of PEN Canada's mandate as supporting those wrongfully imprisoned overseas and I'm proud to have played a part in that over some of the last 25 years.

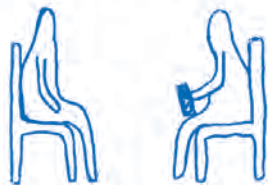
A



COLD



WINTER



MORNING

JULIET O'NEILL

RECALLS THE DAY THE MOUNTIES CAME TO CALL

I am writing this at the dining table in my house where a Royal Canadian Mounted Police man sat amid a jungle of wires with my laptop computer pried open. He was one of ten RCMP who swarmed into my small home the cold winter morning of January 21, 2004.

The table faces the street. Each time he looked up he saw the reporters at the end of the snow-covered yard, stamping their feet to get warm amid their own jungle of cables, microphones, and cameras, some pointed right at him as he copied the contents of my computer.

Relief surged through me each time I glanced out. I am a journalist. My colleagues were out there. Whatever happened in here, people would find out. I turned on the radio and heard news of the search as it was underway.

PEN Canada had also gone to work, issuing a statement of condemnation that was distributed around the world. The raid was an outrageous act of intimidation against journalists and news organizations.

Upstairs, an officer rifled through my book shelves, shaking some open for bits of paper, checking files in a cabinet. I was not allowed to use the adjacent washroom unless an officer was placed in a "contiguous" position.

Yet another officer pored through old letters. And another rifled my tapes and computer discs, placing some in evidence bags. In the bedroom a lady officer went through my most personal stuff — clothes drawers, coat pockets, a jewelry box. She lifted and peered under the quilt where I had been sleeping peacefully just an hour earlier.

In the living room, Sgt. Tom McMillan asked me to take a seat. He was from the RCMP office of truth verification, known to most of us as lie detection. His tape recorder was on. I put mine on too.

The search would take many hours, he said, asking me to go to his office to discuss documents while the search was underway at the house and, I discovered later, at my office too. I did not want to leave my house swarming with police.

"There will be no broken plates," McMillan told me. "We're not into that at all."

I declined to go with him.

As the search neared an end, he told me the most intrusive part was over.

"We want to move on and put this to bed and let some people have some rest," he said.

The RCMP had had enough, he said, of investigating themselves.

It was suspected that someone had leaked a document to me for a story I wrote for the Ottawa Citizen about the case of Maher Arar, a victim of extraordinary rendition.

“Really, the bottom line on this is you’re asking me to name a source for a story,” I replied.

“Absolutely,” said McMillan. “I’m not pussy footing around. I’m asking for the truth.”

He was demanding I break the cardinal rule of journalism.

The threat was the Security of Information Act, the law under which the RCMP obtained the search warrants. It contained a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison for the journalist who receives leaked information.

The battle against that law and the search warrants took nearly three years and cost the Ottawa Citizen and parent company Canwest Global Communications Corp. hundreds of thousands of dollars.

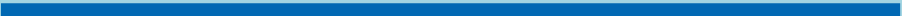
The court ordered all the seized material returned to me. Justice Lynn Ratushny found the law was used as a tool of intimidation during a search for a journalist’s source. She struck down the offending sections as violations of fundamental justice and our constitutional right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the media.

I had been holding my breath for nearly three years, my work as a journalist deformed by threat of criminal sanction. Although their actions had been judged unconstitutional and abusive, it was another year before the RCMP said I was no longer the subject of “an ongoing investigation.”

It is difficult to describe the depths of pressure I experienced during and after this ordeal. But it has never been difficult to express my gratitude for the efforts of PEN whose members kept front and centre the fact that state intimidation of journalists has no place in our democratic country.

“WE
SHOULD
END
THE
PRACTICE
OF
VIEWING
WORDS
AS
CRIMES.”

QUOTE FROM CHARTER 08, A MANIFESTO OF DEMOCRATIC REFORMS
ENDORSED BY MANY THOUSANDS OF CHINESE.



NATIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT

In the last twelve months, there have been several encouraging developments in the legal and political contexts which define freedom of expression issues in Canada. One of the most striking is the Supreme Court of Canada decision, in June 2008, to modify the “honest belief” portion of the fair comment defence. In *WIC Radio Ltd. v Simpson*, The Court introduced an “objective test” which asks whether someone could express an opinion on proved facts. During Rafe Mair’s controversial radio broadcast in 1999, “considering both the content of some of [anti-gay activist Kari Simpson’s] speeches already mentioned, and the broad latitude allowed by the defence of fair comment, the defamatory imputation that while [Simpson] would not engage in violence herself she ‘would condone violence’ by others, is an opinion that could honestly have been expressed on the proved facts by a person prejudiced, exaggerated or obstinate in his views. That is all that the law requires.”

Elsewhere there was evidence of growing respect, however belated, for both the spirit and the letter of the law. In August the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission dropped its complaint against Ezra Levant, former publisher of the *Western Standard*, for printing the Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohamed. Two months later the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal concluded that Mark Steyn’s October 23, 2006 *Maclean’s* article on Islam did not expose Muslims to hatred or contempt. In February 2008, PEN Canada supported both defendants and argued that “neither complaint should ever have been accepted by a human rights commission and such complaints should be immediately dismissed.” While the outcome in both cases suggests that human rights commissions are withdrawing themselves from the regulation of free speech, it is worth remembering that this has happened largely because

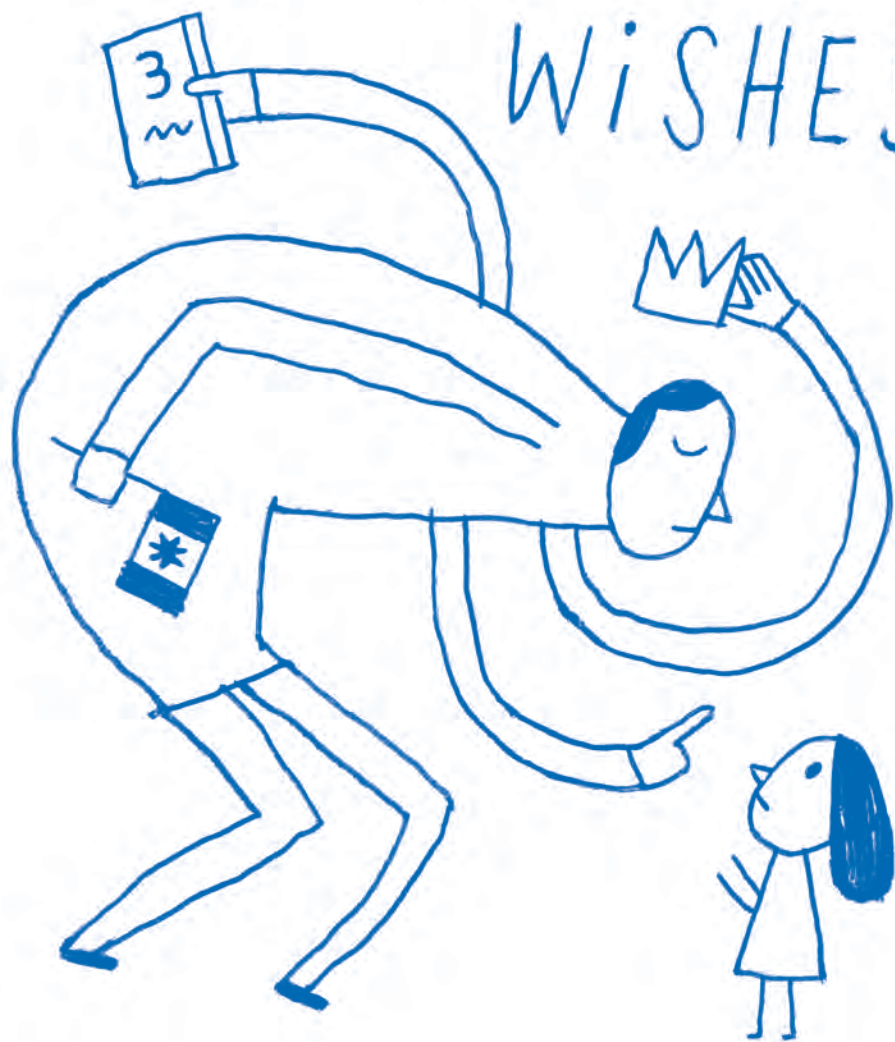
Steyn and Levant fought lengthy and expensive legal battles defending a freedom many Canadians take for granted.

Book censorship is always a sensitive issue in Canada, but even here the news was positive. On June 12, 2008 the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) upheld a recommendation to remove Barbara Coloroso's *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide* from the resource list of a Grade 11 course on genocide and crimes against humanity. A few weeks earlier PEN Canada asked for clarification of the review committee's decision and pointed out that Coloroso's discussion of the Armenian genocide – which formed the basis for the book's review – could hardly be considered controversial within Canada. In 2004 the Canadian parliament overwhelmingly supported the motion "This House acknowledges the Armenian genocide of 1915 and condemns this act as a crime against humanity" – a position re-affirmed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2006. A statement from TDSB Director of Education, Gerry Connelly, noted that although the Board's review had recommended "this book not be used as a historical text, it was always included in the course as reading on the social psychology of genocide."

Another well-publicized challenge took place in December 2008 when the TDSB received a formal complaint from a parent who asked for an official review of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* because of its "explicit sexual content, objectionable language and anti-Christian elements." During the Board's review the school principal allowed the complainant's son to read Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* instead. On February 9, 2009 the TDSB accepted its review committee's recommendations that the novel is "most appropriate for study in Grades 11 and 12," and ought to remain on the curriculum.

As this report goes to press, the Supreme Court of Canada is considering five freedom of expression cases which could have far-reaching implications. The Court's decisions in *Cusson v Quan* and *Grant v Torstar* will address the scope of the "public interest responsible journalism" defence which shields journalists from libel actions once they have made reasonable efforts to verify their facts. The Court is also considering an appeal by the National Post which will determine whether journalists should enjoy a "class privilege" which would allow them blanket protection of the identity of a source, even from police investigations. Furthermore, the Court has agreed to hear an appeal by the Globe and Mail against a Quebec case in which the reporter Daniel Leblanc was ordered to reveal the identity of "Ma Chouette" – a source used to break the Sponsorship scandal five years ago. Finally, the Court will hear an appeal against restrictions on the way media can report details of preliminary hearings, particularly when the accused requests a ban. Each decision could change the way the news media pursues its stories, taken together the cases are likely to have profound consequences for the future of freedom of expression in Canada.

DEBORAH ELLIS
CHALLENGING
WISHES



MY PEN

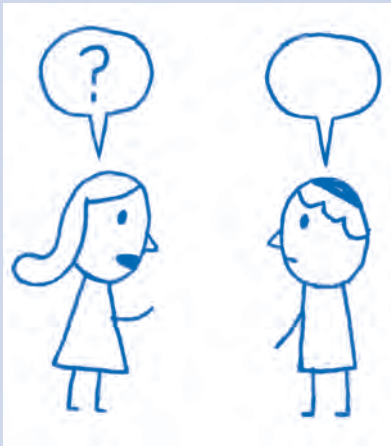
LAWRENCE HILL ON THE CHALLENGE TO DEBORAH ELLIS'S THREE WISHES

I was honoured to support Deborah Ellis and to oppose the decision of The Toronto School Board to pull *Three Wishes* from its school book shelves and to remove it from the Silver Birch reading program. And my stepdaughter Eve Freedman had good reason to feel even more outraged by the censorship.

Eve, who was then nine years old, had already read a number of books by Ms. Ellis – her favourite author. Eve felt it was insulting for detractors of the book to tell her, essentially, that she was not mature enough to handle *Three Wishes*. The irony of the situation was not lost on her: adults were judging the reading abilities of children and restricting their right to read, without consulting them in the first place.

The first thing Eve and I did, in hearing of the controversy, was to hurry up and read *Three Wishes*. In subsequent interviews with The Toronto Star and on CBC TV's The National, Eve argued that it was wrong to underestimate the reading abilities of children.

I joined the voices of the many who supported *Three Wishes*. Deborah Ellis wrote an insightful, respectful book that allows children living in a war zone to describe their daily activities and feelings. Rather than analyzing war from an adult perspective, Ms. Ellis encouraged Palestinian and Israeli children to speak openly about their daily lives. Palestinian and Israeli children interviewed in *Three Wishes* note that barriers of all kinds make it difficult – and sometimes impossible – for them to know each other, or discover each other's humanity. How sad it is that adults impeded Canadian children from learning from their own peers about the tragedies of war.





STIFLING ~~DEBATE~~

DEBORAH ELLIS

ON THE RIGHT TO READ IN SCHOOLS

Three Wishes had been out for a while before anyone took much notice of it. It had been released to a respectable but very quiet reception and I thought that was that. The tumult that came later took me by surprise

Books are supposed to make us think and debate and that is certainly what happened. The questions initially seemed to be about the age appropriateness of such graphic stories of war told by the children who lived through them for the children in our elementary classrooms. It is a legitimate question to raise and certainly worthy of debate. We in the adult world do terrible things to children. Should children be allowed to learn about what we do? Should some of them be protected from this reality for as long as possible? It's an important discussion to have.

Another issue raised is that the situation in the Middle East is too complex for children to understand and *Three Wishes* might give young readers a skewed view of what's going on there. My editor, Shelley Tanaka, worked very hard at having many points of view represented in the book but, again, it's a debate worth having. Through discussion and debate can come understanding and respect.

What really took me by surprise was when the Toronto District School Board pulled it from the library shelves and forced their teachers to remove it from the Silver Birch list. It was disappointing to me that an educational institution should act in a way that makes them appear to be afraid of discussion and debate. While understanding the tremendous pressures faced by teachers, it seemed like a short-sighted decision. And it was fought by a lot of their teachers, who used the book as a discussion point on censorship, or sent notes home to parents, encouraging them to buy the book for their children.

PEN was in the forefront of the fight to keep *Three Wishes* in school libraries. I certainly don't put myself as a writer or my book in the same category as most of the writers PEN champions, writers in danger of being executed, books in danger of disappearing. But I was honoured by their use of the controversy to talk about freedom of speech and the free exchange of ideas which is, after all, the only way to move us all forward.

PEN reminds us that what we take for granted in Canada is not universally practised, and that for each fresh, blank sheet of paper we freely put our pen to, there are many others, stained with blood.



Martha

Kumsa

You

are

not

alone.

MY PEN

JAN BAUER RECALLS THE ROAD TO FREEDOM FOR MARTHA KUMSA

In the story “The Lottery of Babylon” by Jorge Luis Borges, the narrator sums up PEN’s casework perfectly, saying, “Once, for an entire year, I was declared invisible – I would cry out and no one would heed my call.”

Looking back, I sometimes wonder if Martha Kumsa let out a sound, maybe a call, when she was arrested on the street in Addis Ababa and imprisoned without charge or trial for so very long. However faint that call, PEN Canada heeded it. We sent notes, then somewhat longer notes and then letters into that prison in Addis Ababa. Once we began we would not stop.

In her piece, Martha says that the name of PEN gave her hope. I tend to believe that hope always exists and is not the possession of one person to give to another. To me, PEN’s vital casework is more a process of cracking open the door to the place where hope lives so the person who could not find it sees it again. At the time, when Timothy Findley and I were doing what we could to ease Martha’s cares, we wondered who or what we could be for her. Eventually, Tiff said to me that he could be “that most precious of all things, a friend.”

In January 1990 I found myself on a plane from Amsterdam. We flew over the former Yugoslavia where genocide was being planned; over Kosovo where Adem Demaçi (another of PEN Canada’s cases) had been imprisoned for calling for full rights for ethnic Albanians; Over Egypt where blasphemy laws were stifling expression; to Nairobi, where I met with the lawyer representing a newspaper publisher who had been charged with treason for daring to say that President Arap Moi’s administration was failing the people. Finally, to Addis Ababa.

I had to go to there because Martha had become as much a friend to me as I had to her and to try to understand how such things as those that were done to her could happen.

I still have the Oromo dictionary Martha gave to me. I am not sure there is a precise word in Oromo for “friend.” I found *darabe*, which seems to mean “companion, buddy, or friend.” Maybe that will do. And I do not know how to construct the simple sentence “I hope.” But the verb for “to hope” is *abdaccu* and the noun for “hope” is *abdi*. Maybe they will somehow do.

The first steps a member of PEN takes when minding a case may be tentative. I think of the start as a fragment of dialogue with long periods of silence between the lines written. They are heard in the mind as mere whispers because the words have travelled through walls and over great distances. The dialogue begins with the minder. It goes like this:

“Hello? Are you there?” ... “Yes.” ... “So.” ... “You are?” ... “A friend.” ... “I hope so.”

Abdi.



IRON
will

MARTHA KUMSA ON PEN CANADA AS HER PERSISTENT CHAMPION

I remember when I got the first greeting card from PEN. It was one of the lowest moments in my life in an Ethiopian dungeon. I had lost faith in humanity, in goodness, in God. The few words on that card said: We at PEN know about you. You are not alone. Those words were all I needed to hear to restore my faith in humanity. But what was PEN? I remember running for my dictionary.

PEN became the sweetest name on my lips. I uttered it at night when daybreak seemed so far away and it gave me hope to carry on. I voiced it during the day when my life was threatened and it gave me courage to face my tormentors. I shared the name with friends. I imagined PEN as Dimbit – a tiny bird with an iron will. She was too small to tear down those prison walls but she kept pecking at them tenaciously. When the walls finally came tumbling down, PEN became omnipotent in the eyes of my mind. My all-powerful PEN did the impossible and I was released!

The image of PEN took on the names and faces of those who dared to come and visit me in that godforsaken dungeon. Their courage refueled mine. I held PEN very close to my heart when I took my little ones and fled the land of my people. PEN lit the way when we ran by night. PEN gave us cover when we hid by day. Nothing would harm my little ones while I had PEN.

In Canada, PEN introduced me to the finest of Canadian writers and journalists but the joyful moment of inclusion was marred when I suddenly became the black writer. I came as an Oromo and became black here. I laugh about it now but I would be dishonest if I minimize how painful it was at the time. But my PEN minders understood the loss of home and homeland very well. They offered me the warmth of my lost friends and relatives. PEN even brought many more Oromo journalists to Canada. Most importantly, but least successfully, PEN supported my immigration application to reunite with my husband, my childhood sweetheart and father of my children.

PEN wrote letters to Immigration Canada – just as it wrote to the Ethiopian authorities. But Canadians would not budge as Ethiopians did. What? I've been in this limbo for fifteen years now, five years longer than my imprisonment in Ethiopia. PEN's support has never wavered. Over these years, however, PEN itself has once again become that tiny dimbit in the eyes of my mind. The omnipotent PEN has disappeared. My PEN dimbit seems too small to help but she is pecking away at the walls of my Canadian prison with her iron will. Someday these walls of injustice will also crack and I will be released. As my minder used to write: Hope against despair!

I have seen both the evil and the goodness in humanity. I am a living testimony of both. People who did not know my name or face fought on my behalf. My life was given back to me by the goodness in humanity. I will live it out fighting against injustice of all form and shape. I will reach into the ugly dungeons of the world and say: We at PEN know about you. You are not alone.

WRITERS IN EXILE COMMITTEE REPORT

PEN Canada's Writers in Exile Program, for persecuted writers from around the world who have taken refuge in Canada, is one of the core programs of PEN Canada. Its mission is to work with writers who have been forced to leave their homelands for exercising the right of freedom of expression, and help assimilate them into the community of writers in Canada.

PEN Canada's Writers in Exile Committee, provides the guidance, consultation, and oversight over the Writers in Exile Program. Munir Pervaiz (Chair), Karen Connelly, Fraser Sutherland, Todd Babiak, and Senthilnathan Ratnasabapathy, are the current members of this committee. During 2008–09 we have solidified the procedures for the Writers in Exile program to continue to the meet the standards that supporting institutions require.

Membership of the Writers in Exiles Program is the cornerstone of our efforts. Our independent selection committee consists of Joan Leishman (Chair), Sarah Elton, and Ramin Jahanbegloo. The committee carefully assesses applications to assure that the selected writers meet all the requirements of program membership.

Residencies at universities, colleges, and arts and cultural institutions are at the core of the Writers in Exiles program. Last year we filled residencies at McMaster University, George Brown College, University of Alberta, and Berton House with members Sheng Xue, Petronila Cleto, Zdenka Acin, and Jalal Barzanji. We are grateful to these institutions and thank the Royal Bank for supporting the University of Alberta residency.

We are also grateful to PEN Canada's selection committee, (Mary Jo Leddy [Chair], Anna Luengo, and Nurjehan Aziz), who exercise stringent standards and due diligence in selecting these authors.

In addition to the residencies, the Writers in Exile Program helps members of the Exiles Program to interact with their communities and to participate in various cultural activities.

In February 2009, PEN co-sponsored (with China Rights Network and Amnesty International) a panel discussion featuring John Ralston Saul, Sheng Xue and Joseph Wong. The talk was

inspired by Charter 08, a manifesto for human rights and democratic reform in China, and occurred just days after Jiang Weiping, who was in attendance, found asylum in Canada.

Also in February, we celebrated Freedom to Read Week with two well-attended events. “Banned Together,” in partnership with IBBY Canada, featured authors reading from their favourite banned books for children. Writers in Exile Andrea Hila and Benjamín Santamaría Ochoa were among those who took the stage for compelling readings of censored books.

The second FTR event, in partnership with Harper Collins and the Toronto Reference Library, was Closer to the Land: Freedom of Expression and the Environment. It featured Trevor Herriot, Ken McGoogan, Taras Grescoe and Sarah Harmer, led by CBC Radio’s Toronto afternoon host Matt Galloway.

THE TAXI PROJECT

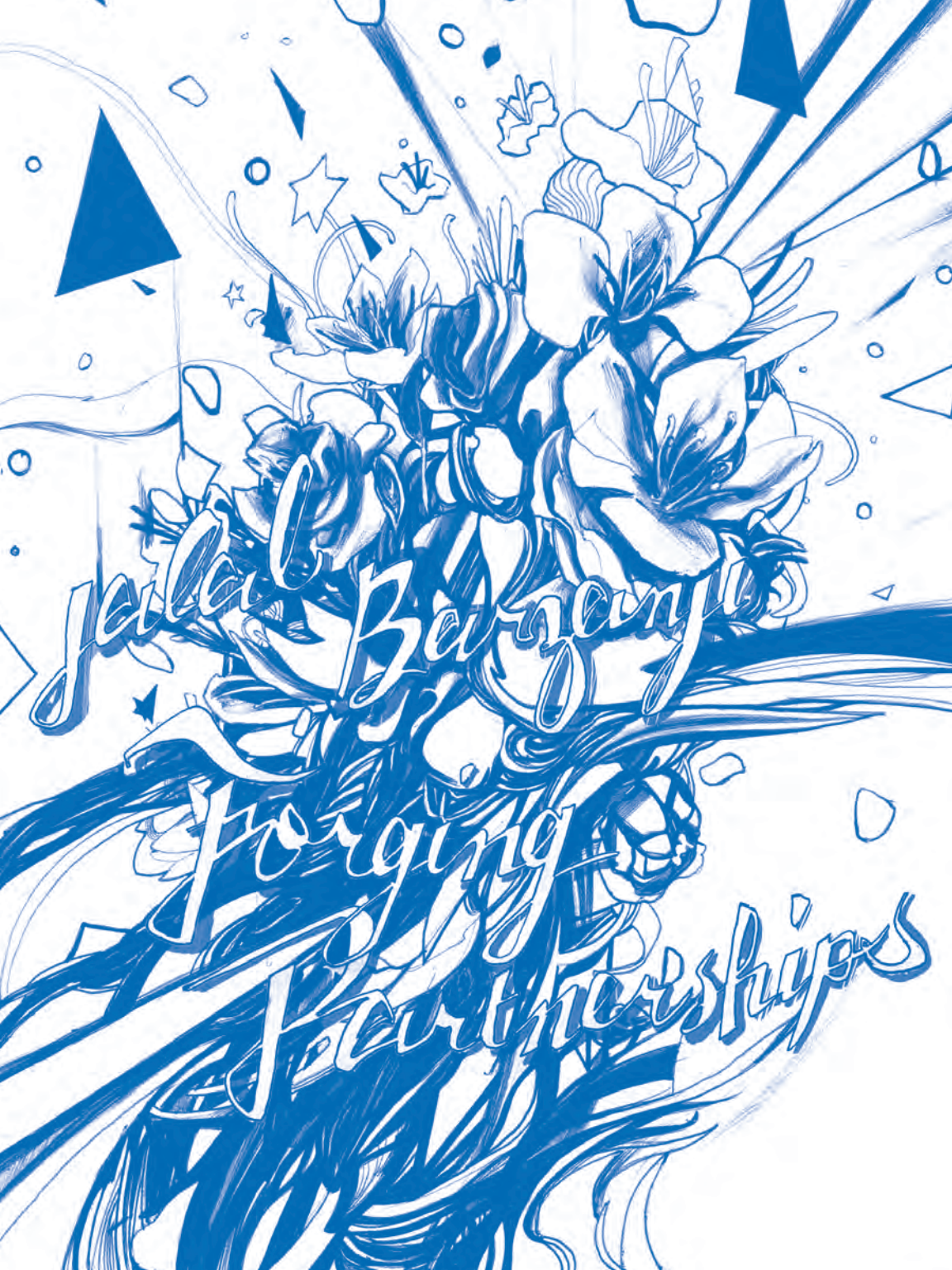
The TAXI Project – a collaboration between PEN Canada and the Art for Real Change Collective – is an original play exploring issues of freedom of expression and the complex realities of living in exile. It was made possible by the support of the Trillium Foundation.

Written by four members of PEN Canada’s Writers in Exile Program (Emma Beltrán, Martha Kuwee Kumsa, Sheng Xue, and Goran Simic) the play follows four characters who are forced to leave their home countries and struggle to create a new life in Canada.

It was mounted at the Alchemy Theatre in Toronto for a sold-out two-week run in the summer of 2008. Each performance was accompanied by a reading and discussion by a member of the Writers in Exile Program. Much of our audience was generated through partnerships with over 20 youth, immigrant, and refugee organizations, and the play received gratifying media coverage.

This spring, The TAXI Project went on the road. From April 14 through May 9, 2009, TAXI visited eight cities in southern Ontario making 30 stops in high schools, libraries and community centres on its way. TAXI developed partnerships with the South Asian Women’s Centre, Access Alliance Multicultural Health Centre, The Children’s Peace Theatre, Folk Arts Council Niagara, Skills for Change, Immigrant Services Kingston and Area, the China Rights Network, and Peterborough Race Relations in order to bring this play to diverse, grass roots communities. Members of PEN’s Writers in Exile Program attended community performances to present their work and lead question and answer sessions.

The educational component of the TAXI Project was enhanced by a short, powerful documentary film, *Sedition*, commissioned by PEN Canada and directed by acclaimed filmmaker Min Sook Lee. The film explores issues of youth and freedom of expression through the lives of young Toronto-based spoken word artists, Rafeef Ziadah and Boonaa Mohammed. The film was sent to each of the schools participating in the TAXI Project and has been accepted into numerous film festivals around the world.



Jella Barnum

Forging
Fourtheships

MY PEN

TODD BABIAK PULLS A COMMUNITY TOGETHER AROUND JALAL BARZANJI

In October, 2006, John Ralston Saul made a speech in Edmonton, challenging the city to host a PEN Canada Writer in Exile. I wrote a column in the local newspaper, the Edmonton Journal, about PEN Canada Writers in Exile, and why it was such a brilliant idea.

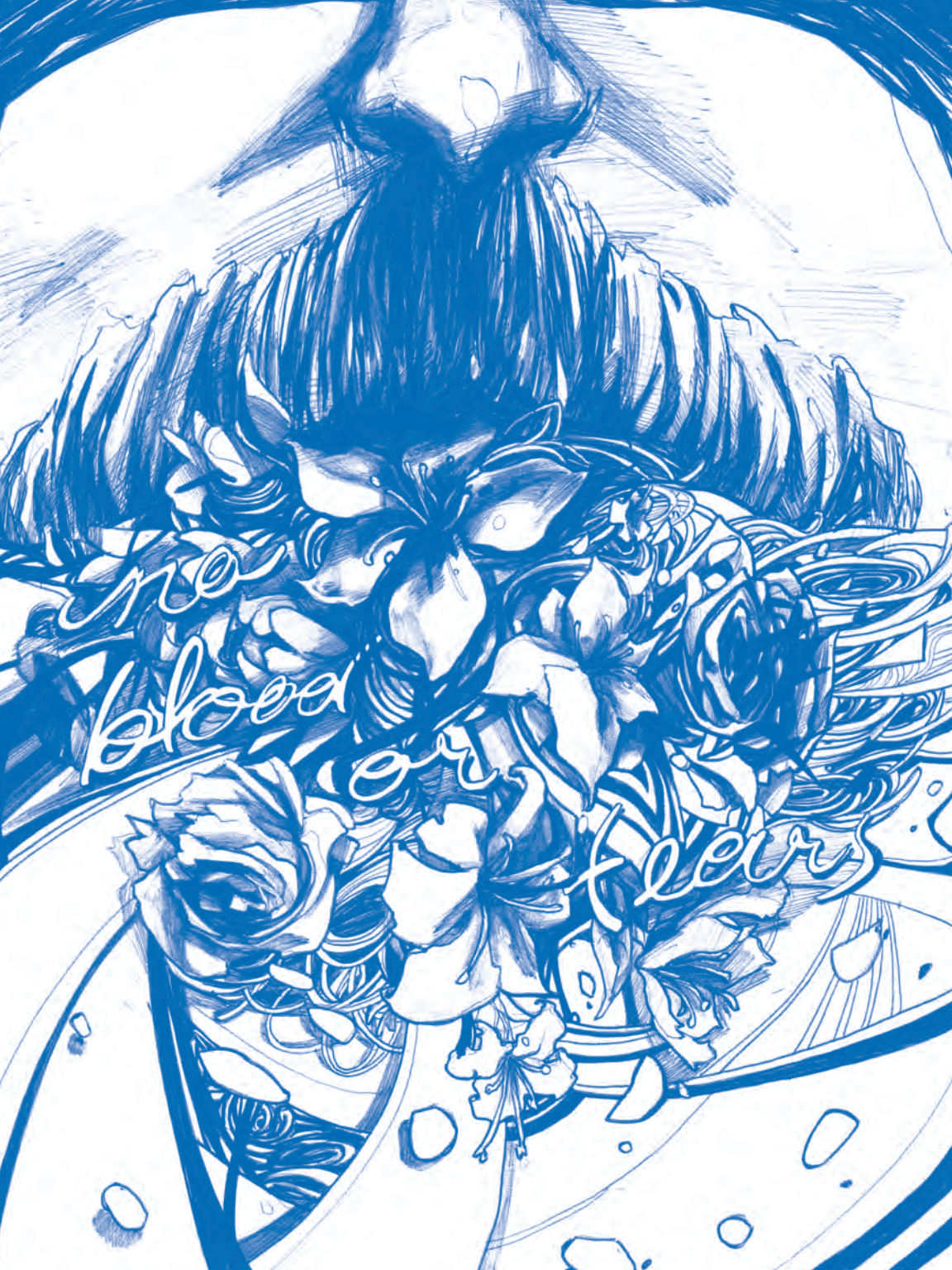
Usually, I only receive negative responses when I write newspaper columns. On this occasion, I received e-mails from a city councillor, the executive director of the Edmonton Arts Council, several local authors, the heads of LitFest, the Writers Guild of Alberta, the Canadian Literature Centre, and former PEN Canada board member Camilla Gibb — who was in town for a writer-in-residence program at the University of Alberta.

We phoned Isobel Harry, at PEN Canada, and asked how one goes about getting a writer-in-exile. She said most programs are attached to universities. The U of A currently has a writer-in-residence program that continues to search for long-term funding sources, and there were some worries that another residency could dilute its brand.

We took that as a challenge to come up with a new model for a city-wide writer-in-exile, to make it both affordable and open to non-academics. Daniel Woolf, then the Dean of Arts at the U of A, was enormously receptive. The Canada Council and the Edmonton Community Foundation agreed to participate. So did Athabasca University and the Edmonton Public Library.

Soon, we had \$45,000. All we needed was a writer. We interviewed a fine candidate in Toronto and offered him the position. It didn't work out, so we decided to look closer to home. At that time, PEN Canada was fairly invisible in Alberta. But writers in exile were all around us — important poets and journalists working security, driving taxis. We found Jalal Barzanji, an Iraqi Kurd, and his charming wife Sabah Tahir. Their stories were harrowing, heartbreaking and inspirational. They were working in immigrant services roles, raising a family, and finding very little time to write. Jalal was perfect, in every way.

The writer-in-exile program, in Edmonton, has been a way to integrate refugee and immigrant authors and journalists into the broader literary community. Rita Espeschit, from Brazil, was our second City of Edmonton PEN writer-in-exile. She has used her “community outreach” time to inaugurate an Alberta association of immigrant authors. Sheng Xue, from China, will be our third writer-in-exile. The program has also increased the profile of PEN Canada enormously, and it has highlighted issues around freedom of expression — with speeches, school visits, readings, and even a new literary conference. I do hope other communities in the rest of Canada can find a way to make this model work for them.



no
blood
on
floors

JALAL BARZANJI FINDS A NEW HOME AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN EDMONTON

I escaped from war in Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) in 1996, to find a refuge where I could write freely. The Canadian government accepted me and my family as refugees in 1998. It took me a while to realise that I was now living in a democratic multicultural country. I had grown up under a dictatorship, with censorship constantly on my mind, in my dreams and nightmares. I did not have intellectual or expressional freedom, and asking for it would have put my life at stake. In Canada, my fear of censorship was gone and there was no blood or tears as a consequence of my writings. This new way of life, the freedom to write freely, was exciting. However, I found that I had little time to write because of the difficulties of adapting to my new lifestyle. I constantly had to work to support my family in our new country, and learning English was another struggle in itself.

Not long after my arrival, the Writers in Exile program started by John Ralston Saul announced that it would support a residency in Edmonton. That announcement changed my life. The city, and the committee in 2007–2008 proudly hosted me as Edmonton's first writer in exile. This was news that I was honored to receive in many ways, not least because it helped me to start writing once again. I have been a writer since 1970, but this was the first time that I had an office to write in, at a library that was free from censorship. The library brought back joyful memories and also some of my time in prison because it was at the library in Kurdistan that I first had the chance to learn from international writers. Later on Saddam Hussein turned the library into a prison.

During my time as a Writer in Exile, I had the chance to write my prison memoir in Kurdish (it has since been translated into English by Dr. Sabah Salah and is ready for publication). I also had the opportunity to do several presentations about the importance of the program, to explain how it allowed writers who did not have the freedom to write in their own countries to write in their new country. I was also able to expand my relations with the community of writers in Edmonton.

The Writers' Trust of Canada also honored me with a visit to Berton House in Dawson City. It felt like a blessing to write in such beautiful solitude. I was grateful for the new experience, because the environment inspired me to explore a different tone in my writing. My trip to Dawson was cut short due to medical needs and family issues, but I did manage to write several chapters for the second part of my memoir. Without the support of PEN Canada and the good people of Edmonton, I would have not had the chance to experience this incredible journey that gave meaning and purpose to my life once again.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

We live in a world of communities. Facebook groups, twitter feeds, book clubs and blogs all draw people together and act as vehicles of social change. It's an era of mass information—even information overload—but at the same time, it's never been easier to get the word out. And then there's PEN. An organization that was founded when the pen and the letter were among the best tools of choice for spreading news and making our grievances known to political leaders.

The PEN membership committee is working to negotiate the organization's long-standing tradition of bringing people together to defend freedom of information with the new world of social media. We want PEN to make sense to those of us who prefer to press the forward button or text a friend as well as to those who still like to lick a stamp. Not only is it a question of survival, but there's the opportunity to use the technology to further the organization's mandate.

The power of electronic communication and the sense of community it easily fosters come together for me in the story of Toronto-blogger Hossein Derakhshan. Derakhshan, often called the god-father of the Iranian blogosphere for his pioneering Persian-language political blog [hoder.com](#), was arrested on a visit to Iran last November for his controversial views. He's been in prison ever since. I never met Hossein in person, but we did correspond online for several months, a few years ago. His instant messages would pop up in my computer screen at all times of the day and it was through these online chats that he educated me about the complex politics of the country where he grew up.

When I heard that he had been arrested, even though we hadn't communicated in years, it felt like a friend had been jailed. Obviously many others did too because even those who had criticized him for his views, have come out to defend him and demand his release. Much of this happened online. The Facebook group, [Free Hossein Derakhshan](#), has 1692 members. There's a twitter channel offering updates on the fight to get him out of jail as well as websites

IT'S AN ERA OF MASS INFORMATION — EVEN INFORMATION OVERLOAD — BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT'S NEVER BEEN EASIER TO GET THE WORD OUT.

like Free the Blogfather. An online letter from the Iranian blogging community states: “freedom of expression is sacred for all not just the ones with whom we agree. We therefore categorically condemn the circumstances surrounding Derakhshan’s arrest and detention and demand his immediate release.”

This is the world in which PEN must operate today.

What this has translated into here on the ground in Canada is a viral email campaign to attract more people to the organization. We asked our members to forward an email explaining our work to their friends and colleagues they believed would be interested in joining us. The results were good; in the weeks after the email went out, we saw an increase in members. Our membership currently stands at 1,000. To help foster a sense of community online, PEN Canada has a Facebook group with just under 1,000 members—please join us by searching our group – and we continue to explore other ways to reach out and foster the growth of our community.

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and
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John Ralston Saul

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