

Val Marie/Swift Current

Val Marie author to share story about abuse survivor at Write Out Loud

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The author of a recently-published book about a sexual abuse survivor's search for justice will be one of the featured writers at the Lyric Theatre's Write Out Loud event in Swift Current Feb. 17.

The Write Out Loud series combines readings by Canadian authors with entertainment by local musicians. The upcoming event will feature three local writers who will read from their work.

Val Marie resident Patricia Stewart's book *Not Just Words: Sexual Abuse and the Canadian Justice System* was published last summer.

The book is a result of an Ontario man's desire to find justice and healing by telling his story of abuse to others.

Stewart, who was born in Toronto, met Wayne Porte when she lived near Lake Simcoe in Ontario, where she worked as a journalist at the *Georgina Advocate*.

The newspaper's editor asked her to attend a poetry reading by Porte at the local library. She was already aware of his reputation in the community as a troublesome person.

"I knew that people in our whole community would try and shy away from him because of his alcoholism and his fighting and stuff like that, but nobody knew why he was doing that," she said.

Their meeting at the library resulted in a lasting friendship and she also discovered his terrible secret.

"I did a couple of stories about him and then I kept in touch after that," she recalled. "One day he broke down and told me what had happened to him. He hadn't told anybody. His mom and dad died, they never knew that he had been assaulted. His family didn't know, his siblings, nobody knew."

Porte then asked her to write a book to tell his story. The book title — *Not Just Words* — was suggested by him.

"That was the title that Wayne wanted because he wanted people to know that when he wrote the poetry it wasn't just words," she said. "It was all his feelings and his pain and everything that went with the sexual assault behind it."

He grew up in the small town of Jackson's Point. He was abused between the ages of 11 and 16 by a family friend. The abuse started in 1962 when his abuser was in his twenties.

"He was a family friend and Wayne was afraid to tell his parents," she said. "So Wayne never told his parents why he was doing all the fighting and being so belligerent."

Porte decided decades later to go to the police and his abuser was sentenced to three years in prison, but he was released on parole after 18 months.

"So Wayne was happy that somebody believed him, but disappointed that was the only sentence that the guy got," she said.

The release of his abuser did not help Porte to deal with the past and to recover.

"Unbelievably the guy that assaulted him was allowed to go anywhere after he served his year and a half," she said. "He would go back to the community. So when Wayne was living there, he would see him again."

Porte eventually moved to Toronto and for health reasons he is now staying with family in Sarnia. She started to do the interviews for the book around 2000 and she continued to interview him over the telephone after

moving to Val Marie in 2001.

"That took quite some time because he would just get part way into it and then he'd break down," she said. "He had to hang up and then we had to wait another day and do it. It was really hard for him and it brought the whole thing back. I can't even imagine what he was going through."

Stewart wanted information about the trial for the book, but efforts to obtain a transcript resulted in a 10-year struggle to overturn a publication ban on the trial and a ban on the availability of information afterwards.

"So that's why it took me 14 years to get this book done," she said. "Wayne was kind of discouraged. Every time I'd phone him and we'd run into another road block he would be so upset and so discouraged and I was so angry by this point that they would make a victim go through all of this that I just kept on. I was not going to give up."

The first part of the book focuses on the abuse he experienced. The second part deals with his efforts to find justice and it also highlights legal and judicial issues.

"The second half is more about the law, trying to get the ban overturned," she said. "I took up a petition here in our community to try and get enough signatures to take to David Anderson to take to Parliament to try and get the legislation changed to keep these men in prison longer. It goes into the police investigating and all the different methods that the police use to try and trap these people."

Stewart believes there is a need for reforms to the justice system to ensure abusers receive stricter sentences and that they are not released before serving their full prison term.

"They need 20 odd years for an assault and each child to me is as important as the other," she said. "There shouldn't have to be six or seven kids that a man assaults before he gets a longer sentence. One child, the first child, is just as important as the last child. It ruins their life just as much as it ruins the last child's life."

It was a challenging experience for her to do the interviews with Porte and to write the book.

"It was difficult listening to Wayne because we became very good friends," she said. "It's hard listening to somebody who's sobbing, telling what happened to them, and seeing what it has done to their life."

She dealt with a lot of information about abuse while researching and writing the book, which had a personal impact on her.

"It makes you cynical," she said. "You look at different cases that go on. It makes you angry, because really there's nothing personally that you can do alone to change things and you try to talk to people and a lot of people don't want to discuss it. ... It became like my whole life and enveloped me in this dark place. So I can't imagine even what it's like for the victim who goes through this like Sheldon Kennedy, Theo Fleury, Wayne and any of the others that went through this."



Photo contributed

Val Marie resident Patricia Stewart will be reading from her book *Not Just Words: Sexual Abuse and the Canadian Justice System* at the Lyric Theatre's Write Out Loud 2016 Local Writers Night, Feb. 17.

She has hope for the future because more counselling is available for abuse victims.

Organizations such as the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre is providing support to victims and raising more awareness about the issue.

Stewart is selling the book privately for \$20 per copy, of which \$12 will be donated to the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in Calgary and \$8 will be used for future reprints. To purchase a copy, send an e-mail to aundak@gmail.com.

The other local writers who will share their works with people at the next Write Out Loud event are Mitzi Tait-Zeller of Swift Current and Madonna Hamel of Val Marie.

Tait-Zeller is an experienced horse enthusiast and the author of *Hoof Prints on My Heart* and *Rim-Fyre* and the *Stones of Time*. She is the 2013 recipient of the Equine Welfare Communications Award from the Saskatchewan Horse Federation and Farm Animal Council.

Hamel is currently working on her book *Habits, Orders and Vows* that looks at the influence of religion as a cultural inheritance. She has written and performed one-woman monologues, she has created award-winning radio documentaries, she writes reviews for *The Globe and Mail* and *Inter* magazine, and she is also a singer-songwriter.

The Write Out Loud 2016 Local Writers Night takes place at the Lyric Theatre Feb. 17. Admission is \$8. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and readings start at 7 p.m. For more information, visit the Lyric Theatre website at www.lyrictheatre.ca.

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DEN OUDEN; BORN TO NICOLE AND ANDREW DEN OUDEN OF FRONTIER, A BABY BOY BORN FEBRUARY 4, 2016

ENTZ; BORN TO ADINNA AND TERRY ENTZ OF GULL LAKE, A BABY GIRL BORN FEBRUARY 6, 2016

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