

Fragmented family struggles for acceptance

THE BOOK SHELF



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Shelley Thompson’s debut novel about a young transgender woman who returns to her family farm in rural Nova Scotia following her mother’s death is a hopeful rallying cry for communities across the country to create welcoming and safe places for everyone.

The novel *Roar* (Vagrant Press) was inspired by the screenplay Thompson wrote for her first feature film *Dawn, Her Dad and the Tractor*, which premiered in Toronto in May 2021 and in Halifax later that year.

“It is the same family; it is the same story,” said the Wolfville-based actor and writer in a recent interview. “But I wouldn’t really say I adapted the screenplay.”

In the novel, Thompson goes deeper, delving into the characters’ motivations and internal struggles – something she felt she couldn’t do in the film. Based on some of Thompson’s own experiences as the mother of a trans child, the novel is told from multiple points of view. Through different viewpoints, she shows how each character struggles through their grief and coming to accept Dawn. The novel’s central character transitioned after she left home and while her mother was receiving cancer treatment. While Dawn’s mother supported her transition, it was kept a secret from the rest of her family.

“I wanted to honour what everybody was coping with,” said Thompson. “Yes, Dawn is at the centre of the story as the catalyst, but it really is a story about a whole bunch of people. A family and a community and a queer community coming to grow around this person who comes into their town and a straight cis (gender) community that grows around this person and

learns from them.”

Born as Donald, Dawn leaves home and the judgments and opinions of her small town to discover who she really is in Toronto and Montreal before finally finding her community in Halifax. She shares her transition with her mother but no one else in the family. Dawn and Miranda met frequently over the years in Halifax when Miranda went to the city for her cancer treatment. When Dawn returns home after her mother’s death, she meets her father, her sister Tammy and her sister’s fiancé, Bryon, for the first time as herself.

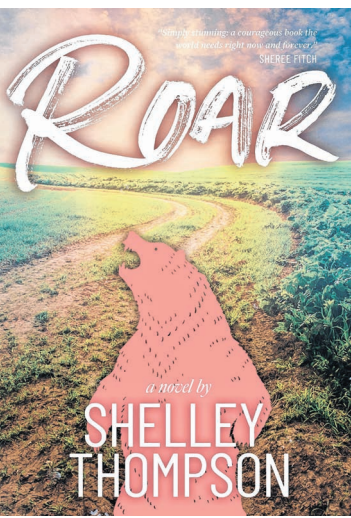
Dawn’s father and sister find themselves grieving for the son and brother they once knew, while Byron, becomes a sympathetic ally, helping her cope with the complicated reaction from her family and the ignorant, unwanted attention from some people in her hometown.

Through love and a deeper desire to understand, the family comes together again and, in the process, becomes a catalyst for change in their rural community. Thompson drew on some of her experiences of living in a small Nova Scotia town. In 2005, she and her family moved to Antigonish where her husband, Ed Thomason, was the artistic producer of Festival Antigonish.

“I did want to write about a rural community because much of what we’re reading about the trans community comes from the urban experience,” she said. “A lot of our experience is reflected in different characters in the book.”

While writing, Thompson drew on her son’s experience and also her own perspective as the parent of a transgender child but during the editing process, she used sensitivity readers to flag any potentially offensive material or stereotypes. She wanted to ensure that she captured a realistic experience of being trans, beyond her own perspective.

“If you’re going to write about a community where you don’t live at the centre of it,



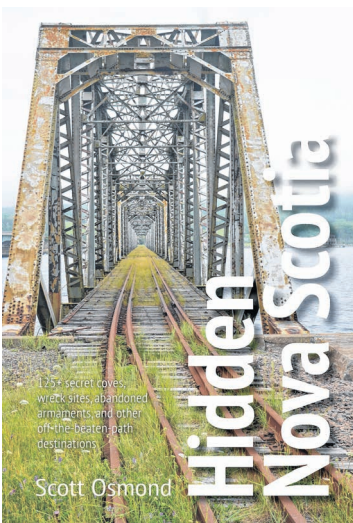
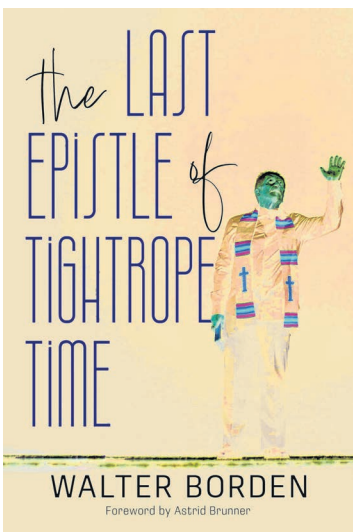
Author Shelley Thompson

you need to be very engaged with that community and have their support and their permission,” she said.

To celebrate the launch of *Roar*, Thompson has a number of upcoming events and readings scheduled around the province. The book’s launch is on Nov. 13 at 7 p.m. at The Carleton in Halifax. She’ll be joined by musicians Ian Sherwood and her son, T. Thomason, now a Toronto-based singer/ songwriter. Earlier this year, Six Shooter Records announced that it signed Thomason to its label.

“I’m enormously proud of him and I’m enormously grateful that he is flying back to celebrate this. It’s a wonderful thing,” said Thompson.

On Nov. 12 at 3 p.m., readers can join Thompson at the Inside Story in Greenwood. On Nov. 16 at 7 p.m. she’ll be at Steeple Green Books in Musquodoboit Harbour; on Nov. 18 at 7:30 p.m. at On Paper Books in Sydney; on Nov. 23 at 4 p.m. at LaHave



River Books in LaHave and on Nov. 24 at 7 p.m. at Lunenburg Bound in Lunenburg.

The *Last Epistle of Tightrope Time*

Actor, poet and playwright Walter Borden released a revised edition of his autobiographical play *The Last Epistle of Tightrope Time* (Nimbus Publishing).

The play explores his experiences as a Black gay man facing racism, poverty, and homophobia. Told through the voices of 10 characters, it is one of the first plays in Canada to examine themes around male homosexuality from a Black perspective.

The *Last Epistle of Tightrope Time* premiered at Neptune Theatre in September 2022. The new print edition includes 15 photos taken during the Neptune show. It was previously published as *Tightrope Time: Ain’t Nuttin’ More Than Some Itty Bitty Madness Between Twilight and Dawn*.

Borden was born in New Glasgow. He has received countless awards and honours over his career including the Order of Canada and being inducted into the Dr. William P. Oliver Wall of Honour Society at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia.

Hidden Nova Scotia

Author Scott Osmond leads readers to secret waterfalls, sinkholes and shipwrecks in his new book *Hidden Nova Scotia: 125 + Secret Coves, Wreck Sites, Abandoned Armaments, and Other Off-the-Beaten-Path Destinations* (Boulder Books).

“Nova Scotia contains a world of hidden stories, curious places, and off-the-beaten path destinations,” he writes in the book’s introduction. “Relics, each representing a significant period in the province’s development, are found everywhere. Throughout the centuries, mining operations, sawmills, railways, and military fortifications have come and gone, leaving unique places to explore.”

The book is divided into regions in the province and each destination includes a site description, historical context, information about the area and how to get there.

Bent, Bruised, Abused, but Not Broken

Bent, Bruised, Abused, but Not Broken: The Susan Dealy Story (FriesenPress) is Susan Dealy’s candid account of her life, including the 20 years she served in the Canadian Armed Forces, and suffered sexual, emotional, and physical abuse.

She was also the victim of several online romance scams. Her memoir includes information and tips to help prevent others from falling prey to internet dating scams, according to the book’s promotional material. Dealy hopes her memoir delivers a message of hope by showing readers that it is possible “to turn your mess into a message.”

Read between the lines with journalist and author Allison Lawlor as she explores the Nova Scotia book scene and chats with local authors in her bi-weekly column.

The best shrubs with berries

GET GROWING



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There’s a stand of winterberry holly near the entrance to my subdivision.

In spring and summer, it’s a bright green mound of foliage, but in autumn and early winter, the branches light up with a beautiful display of brilliant red berries.

There are many reasons to plant shrubs with berries. The biggest one is late season colour and interest. You’ll find shrubs with fruits in shades of red, orange, white, pink, and even purple. Growing berried plants in your garden also means plenty of branches for indoor and outdoor winter and holiday decor. They also provide food to birds and other types of wildlife.

As noted above, winterberry is a great choice for the late-season landscape. It’s a native deciduous shrub, often found growing in ditches and other areas with moist soil. That said, it also thrives in average garden soil and there are many standout cultivars available from garden centres.

These are tough, hardy plants that are resistant to deer as well as insect pests and diseases. Common winterberry grows six to 10 feet tall, but some of the newer cultivars stay more compact and grow



Pearl Glam beautyberry is a standout shrub with purple autumn berries. **PROVEN WINNERS COLORCHOICE**

just three to four feet tall.

Good choices include Berry Poppins (and the male Mr Poppins) and Berry Heavy, both having red berries. Or maybe you’d prefer Little Goblin, which has orange berries, or Berry Heavy Gold, whose stunning golden berries add beauty to the winter garden as well as holiday decor.

Holly plants have separate male and female plants and in order to get a good show of berries you must have at least one of each. The male flowers bear pollen, while the female blooms turn into the berries. It’s essential to read labels when buying plants to make sure you buy both sexes. One male plant can pollinate five to six female holly plants. Be sure to plant them relatively close together.

Beautyberry is another show-stopping shrub boasting bright green leaves and vibrant amethyst berries. It grows four to five feet tall with gently arching branches. It’s attractive during the growing season, but as summer fades the small glossy berries deepen to their mature purple hue.

Because beautyberry flowers self-pollinate and can be planted singly.

However, planting a clump of two to three shrubs significantly boosts fruit production.

Like winterberry, beautyberry grows best in moist to average garden soil. It can be planted in part shade, but for the best show of berries give the plants full sun. Pearl Glam is a popular cultivar with purple-green leaves.

Snowberry and coralberry are related native shrubs

that are both very hardy and produce showy autumn berries. Snowberry plants grow up to five feet tall and have, as the name suggests, cream-coloured fruits.

Coralberry is smaller, growing three to four feet tall and producing coral-pink berries.

Proud Berry coralberry is an improved cultivar with a compact mounded form and bubblegum pink berries. Pinky Promise is a stunning snowberry that is perfect for small spaces. It grows just two to three feet tall and wide with cream and pink-hued berries.

A couple of years ago I bought a holiday wreath from a local farmers market. It was a mixture of evergreen boughs but what caught my eye was the bunches of bayberry berries tucked into the greenery. The small silvery berries added natural beauty to my front entrance, as well as the characteristic bayberry fragrance.

Bayberry is a mid-sized native shrub with berries that aren’t as showy as some of the other species above, but the waxy-blue-gray berries are attractive and provide winter food to many species of birds and wildlife.

Other shrubs with berries include American cranberry bush, elderberry and chokeberry.

Niki Jabbour is the author of four best-selling books, including her latest, *Growing Under Cover*. She is a two-time winner of the American Horticultural Society Book Award. Find her at SavvyGardening.com and on social media.

FROM PAGE B5 LETTERS

There I worked in the Whitehall theatre. German planes would fly over East Grinstead on their way to and from their bombing runs to London.”

“On July 9th, 1943 a German plane was being chased by our fighters when the German let his bombs go. One of the bombs made a direct hit on our movie theatre killing 108 and injuring many more. My best friend was killed, and I was seriously injured and spent six weeks in the hospital. By this time, I was three months pregnant and very worried about my baby. Bob spent hours going from one hospital to another looking for me after spending many hours helping to carry the dead and injured from the rubble, never knowing if one of them was going to be his wife. When he finally found me, he was as white as chalk. It was a difficult task for him as many of his buddies were in the theatre at that time.

That was the end of that, Bob made arrangements for me to go to Canada. He didn’t want to have to worry about me along with all the other worries of being a soldier in WW II. I arrived in Canada aboard the Mauritania ship at Pier 21 in Nov. 1943 where Bob’s wonderful family welcomed me with open arms. Our baby girl, Sandy, was born in March, perfectly healthy. After Bob got home from the war our family increased by two more children, a son, Larry and another daughter, Donna. Our family has since risen to five granddaughters, nine great-grandsons and one great-granddaughter. Life is good!”