

A Day at the
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I borrowed my daughter's digital camera because I planned to capture moments and images of the day. These collections can be better appreciated by visitors with high-speed connections. Yeah, some of them take a while to download...

- The Poets' Pathway - [the actors](#)
- Scenes from [MacKenzie King bridge](#)
- Sparks Street - [windows and sky](#)
- An [innnnteresting tree](#), framing another tree with its... hand?
- The [secret bench of knowledge](#) at the National Library of Canada

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A Day at the Writers Festival

I don't get out much. When I *do* arrange for my "solo" time away from the pandemonium of our lively, cluttered home, I make efforts to attend events that nurture and cultivate creativity and thought. What can I say? I'm thoroughly enjoying this journey in becoming a more enlightened person.

On Saturday, September 21, 2002 I attended three events of the [Ottawa International Writers Festival](#). This was my first time as a member, appreciating the discount in ticket prices as well as enjoying the opportunity to sit in the first three rows (not that I did every time, but it was nice to know I could).

This was the second event for which the weather was unseasonable. The [previous event was in late March](#) of this year, during which we encountered a beautiful yet inconvenient December-like snowfall - one week after highs of 25 degrees! On this day in September, we were still in the middle of a warm spell with a high of 27 degrees Celsius. Not that it was inconvenient but rather strange for a day so late in September.

My little essay here covers only three of the many events happening at the festival that runs until the 28th. This one day was all I could attend during the whirlwind of my life loaded with responsibilities. One other event I would really like to attend is

"Uncommon Prayer: Peace, Poetry, and Prose" on the 28th. Alas, that is my husband's birthday and I do not think I can manage to get away...

Surreal Beginnings

The best word I can use to describe most experiences of the day would be "surreal", in the dreamlike way. It certainly was welcome to help me forget about the frustrating workweek out of which I had just dragged my sorry self. The recent events of my work life were enough to encourage me to save up to buy a parcel of land, learn to be self-sufficient and write poetry. Sigh... Okay, back to reality.

I awoke at 7:30 and headed out of the house by 9:00 - on a Saturday morning. On a *Saturday morning*, one of the few times I can enjoy semi-rest and reflection. My three children were unpleased that I was not toiling in the kitchen, preparing them some brunchon banquet involving eggs in one form or another. They would have to fend for themselves or wake the sleeping old bear.

The Poets' Pathway

After some delays and spilled coffee on the jerky OC Transpo bus ride plus a few detours near Rideau Street, I made my way to Arts Court for a performance of "The Poets' Pathway: A Walk Through Ottawa's Literary History". The pleasant and understanding lady at the box office let me in quietly to the darkened, hushed theatre. There I enjoyed a delightful presentation of the poetic works by six poets who lived during the early years of Canada's Confederation. Interestingly, some of these people were civil servants who, while carrying on the tasks of their work lives, were also expressing their love for the land and awe of the nature surrounding them.

The event was presented in part by The Poets' Pathway Committee (represented by Steven Artelle) and the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital. If you visit their Web site, you will see a plan for preserving a 30-kilometer arc of land leading south from the Beechwood Cemetery in the East end to Britannia Park in the West. It is a noble and beautiful endeavour that deserves the support of anyone who has the power or resources to help.

Following the play and speech by Erwin Dreesen, we were invited to a lounge-like area to mingle with the actors and organizers plus purchase pricey food and drink. After my eyes had adjusted to the light I was delighted to meet the actors who were still in their period dress. I even managed to capture some of them in a digital camera.

While speaking with Alfred Garneau (A.K.A. Chris Roberts), I learned that Garneau did not intend to publish any of his writings. It was his son who published his father's works after his worldly departure. That provided an interesting discussion topic: writing only for the personal joy of it but concealing your work from the world or, writing and welcoming the desire to share your thoughts, feelings and dreams with others. Since Alfred had places to go I managed to corner him for at least one more minute for a photographic opportunity.

As I approached the table promoting a "chapbook" about the Poets' Pathway, I was immersed in a personal dialogue about some of my own poetry that I had been holding back. What if I did submit my first collection to that contest? Would I still feel as if I had "sold my soul"? What if I actually won first or second prize? The conclusion was "You'll never know unless you try".

When I awoke from my little internal debate, I engaged in conversation with Grant Wilkins, an independent "litzine" publisher and editor. During our discussion, he mentioned opportunities to meet publishers and writers at the [Ottawa Small Press Book Fair](#) on October 26th. Since March of 2000, Grant has been producing "Murderous Signs", a chapbook featuring various poets. I know you're as curious as I was in knowing the significance in his title choice. It's not as violent as it sounds, though. You may never know the meaning unless you visit his [Web site](#), obtain a few issues of "Signs" or you have had the patience to read and understand Homer's, "The Iliad".

Erwin Dreesen and his wife Gerde arrived at the table to ask Grant about the reception of the "Poets' Pathway" chapbooks. When I made an inquiry about more information on GACC, Erwin provided me with that as well as a very passionate discourse on the possibilities of this endeavour. They have a lot of work ahead of them and welcome the skills, efforts and commitment of other volunteers.

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Dogma Play

Our conversation was cut short by the sound of the bell that it was noon and time to go back to the theatre for a production of "I Shall Tell You All", a short, semi-absurd play about religious dogma.

The author, Mohammed Salmawy wrote this piece before the 1967 war in Egypt. Most members of the audience seemed to thoroughly enjoy the play. Some even took active part in the question period afterwards. My personal conclusion, in agreement with the

author was that the work is open for interpretation. To a point, that's okay. But I'm thinking... Hmmmm, open for interpretation... so are so many of the religious texts. Some are taken literally to the point of brutality and some are overly-interpreted to conveniently accommodate the times in which we live.

Free-time

If you've read this far, I congratulate you and thank you for your patience. I won't bother you with the boring details of what I did on my free time and space between Arts Court and the National Library but I can provide visual effects with a [little picture show](#).

At around 3:30 I arrived at the National Library on Wellington well in advance of the next session. In that extra time, I just had to stop and take photographs of the "[Secret Bench of Knowledge](#)". As you approach closer and closer you can see inscriptions in different hand writing, all promoting the benefits of reading. Sigh...

A Dialogue of Civilizations

The description of this event really appealed to me as I [appreciate questions](#) asking who we are and where we came from. Perhaps more importantly, what can we learn from each other and how can we stop driving our civilization into a pit of despair? Finally, I took advantage of the perk as a Festival member and sat within the three front rows. I chose the second row and was positioned between two older ladies who were pleasant to chat with prior to and after the session.

Festival Director, Neil Wilson hosted this event. After he introduced the panel of four authors there was a healthy rumble of laughter when someone from the audience asked who he was. And so, he introduced himself for those who were not aware. *Tsk, tsk. Newbies.*

I found most members of the panel to be very intelligible and eloquent, especially the one who filled in for the Nunavut author who could not make it due to some family emergency. He had a very honest, down-to-earth and unpretentious manner of speaking.

It took a lot of concentration and patience for me to absorb the thoughts of the Chinese author as he spoke through an interpreter. How much of his thoughts could we salvage as he, an individual from a different culture and way of thinking was expressing himself to the interpreter? In turn, the interpreter was relaying - in his broken english - the

author's thoughts to us. It was an interesting experience.

I was a little taken aback by an analogy of one member and I'm not sure what point he was trying to make but he was mentioning North Americans and the show "The Sopranos" in the same sentence. Personally, I do not enjoy movies or television shows that glamourize organized crime and I am ashamed if our culture is associated with them.

There was of course time for questions from the audience. Some were intelligent and relevant; some were not. This is only my second event like this but I can conclude that it is not a personal forum. If you ask a question, make sure it is relevant, people! Is it appropriate to put a writer on the spot for something he can not control? If you want a soapbox, get one. Write a column. Write a book. Or better yet, get a Web site (wink, wink).

One of the most applicable questions was directed to the member from Nunavut and asked about challenges for their development as a new territory of Canada, coming from an oral society. The member was very articulate and honest in his answers. They have a lot of challenges ahead of them in getting their language put into writing. They've already experienced a lot of social changes since becoming a new territory. I can somewhat relate to this ordeal as my husband comes from a [culture that depends on Griots \(human libraries\)](#) to relay and record history.

This event did not provide any instant solutions to the world's problems but provided more questions for further thought and discussion. When the session finally ended, I really had to get ready to leave. I stopped for brief conversations with new acquaintances, greeted one speaker and complimented him on his very eloquent performance. I was disappointed that I could not meet with another as some well-coiffed woman with Sophia Loren glasses had him monopolized, smothering him with lengthy saccharin compliments.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed my day out at the Writers Festival. I really enjoyed having a day out by myself. Period. I wish I could have attended more events but do not have enough resources as in time and money. I was inspired enough though to release another baby into the world. As I am writing this essay, a package containing my first collection of poetry is on its way to enter into its first literary contest. Please wish me luck.

Gosh, thanks for reading this far. If you enjoyed this lengthy essay, perhaps you would like to read some of my shorter works such as [poetry](#) and [book reviews](#)?

T.A. Jobateh

September 27, 2002

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Links to organizations mentioned in this essay:

- Ottawa International Writers Festival - www.writersfest.com
- National library - www.nlc-bnc.ca
- Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital / Poets' Pathway - www.flora.org/greenspace
- Murderous Signs, a litzine at <http://home.achilles.net/msigns/>
- Ottawa Small Press Book Fair - www.track0.com/rob_mclennan/small_press_book_fair.htm

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A Day at the Writers Festival

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These are momentos from my day at the 2002 Ottawa International Writers Festival. Since it was one of my few days out in a long, long time, I took advantage of it to the fullest! I hope you will enjoy this compilation of thoughts and images.

- ~ Poets' Pathway
- ~ Dogma Play
- ~ A Dialogue of Civilizations

Theresa Jobateh, amateur poet and writer

September 27, 2002

www.jobateh.ca

**My Encounter with the actors of The Poets'
Pathway**



Actors from left to right: Allan Meltzer (W.W. Campbell), Kathryn Baker (S.F. Harrison), Peter Politis (W.P. Lett)



Chris Roberts (Alfred Garneau)

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[Read more about The Poets' Pathway](#)

Visit the [Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital](#)

Scenes from the MacKenzie King Bridge



[View the scenery again?](#)

Reflections on a Bridge - a poem

I had just encountered some poetry
From the 19th century
Read by actors on a hushed stage
Dressed in the costume of that age.

Civil servants and settlers then
Celebrating nature with the pen

Painting the river, the young green land
Wishing man and nature go hand in hand.

I study this calm urban scenery
the hot concrete and cool greenery
It's been so long I can't remember
Knowing such a warm September.

The time is my own on this Saturday
Alone and curious I make my way
Alone and free of all demands
Whiny little voices and busy hands.

So on this bridge, here I stand
Gazing over this developed land
This day is mine and belongs to me
I choose what I want to hear or see.

Here I stand, slowly gazing around
Then to the direction that I am bound.
I capture some scenery from this day
Then take the bridge to continue my way.

I continue my way along the street
Feeling freedom and adventure on my feet
Anticipating encounters and discovery
On this day that belongs to me.

T.A. Jobateh
Inspired September 21, 2002

Essay: Pictorial Home