

Author's first work leading to opportunities

by Heather MacAdam

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Following the release of his debut novel earlier this year, an Antigonish native was one of nearly 80 authors from across the country selected to take part in the 15th annual International Writers Festival in Banff.

Michael Palmer, son of Lou and Mary Palmer, was chosen to attend after completing *Dark Side of the Sun*, a story about his grandfather George Palmer during the Second World War.

Palmer said he and his wife Catharine attended Wordfeast, the dinner that kicked off the International Writer's Festival, Oct. 12.

There were about 100 people in attendance, including 28 of the 74 selected authors.

"Each table had an author with about six other people," Palmer said. "Catharine and I ended up sitting with the parents of the Wordfest organizer Anne Green."

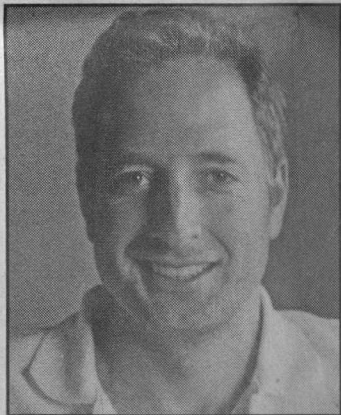
Green's parents, British citizens in their early 80s who live in Edmonton, were great to chat with, Palmer said.

"Her dad had actually been an interpreter during the war tribunals in India when WWII ended," Palmer said, adding he could speak Japanese and was a lawyer when they were putting the Japanese on trial.

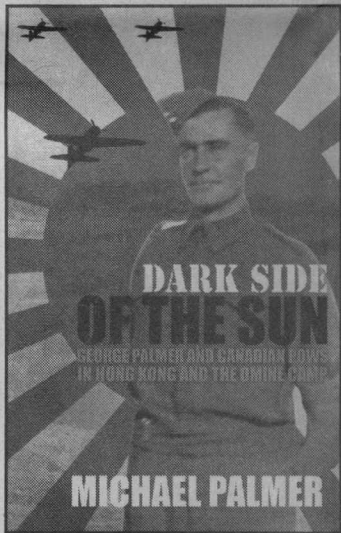
"So, as you can imagine, he and I had some great chats on the topic."

Palmer said there were wonderful speeches by author and scholar Alberto Ruy-Sanchez and international award-winning author Jane Jirouhart.

On the second day of the conference Palmer said he and three other authors attended the



Antigonish native Michael Palmer took part in the 15th annual International Writers Festival in Banff. He was chosen to participate based upon his first book *Dark Side of the Sun*.



Alberta Bound event at the Art Gallery in downtown Calgary.

He added there were daily author events over the week-long festival with different authors participating.

"We spent about 20 minutes each speaking about our book and our journey to get our books written and published," he said. "Our theme for this Alberta Bound event was 'Poetry, War, Mystery, and Memoir.' [We] discussed the themes of our books and we read excerpts from our books as well."

Palmer said the event included a connection from home.

"I saw two X-grads in the crowd which was nice - my sister Colleen Palmer and Dave Bernatchez who graduated from St. FX. back in the mid-80s."

Palmer said he travelled from Calgary to the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts Oct. 15 for a three-day author retreat.

That evening he attended a social where he met international best-selling authors including Philipino Miguel Syjuco and New Zealander Eleanor Catton.

"[It] was a bit intimidating at first," he said.

The next few days brought about a common routine, Palmer said, with discussion seminars involving the literary arts.

"I had a wonderful one-on-one chat with international best-selling *Life of Pi* author, Yann Martel," Palmer said.

"I would have thought he'd be living in New York or Paris or some other writing hub, as he had grown up in Paris for some time where his Canadian parents were diplomats, but he told me he currently lives in Saskatoon of all places and enjoys it there."

Palmer said he asked many questions about his writing life, adding it was quite surreal to be sitting there next to him.

"I met and had a wonderful chat for a whole morning with prolific non-fiction writer, Sharon E. McKay who's words knew no bounds," he said. "She was quite blunt with her words and hilarious. You couldn't get tired listening to her."

McKay, in turn, introduced Palmer to John Pearce, an agent for Canada's biggest literary agency Westwood Creative Artists.

"John and I had a great chat about my new book, *Beggars' Bookends*," Palmer said. "He was charitable with his time as he offered up many tidbits and tips regarding agents and the publishing world."

Beggars' Bookends is set in 1989 when the mystery of a dead body uncovers a journey involving a young man and his elderly hospital roommate that takes readers from the adventurous and traumatic boyhood experiences in small-town New Jersey to the Japanese-occupied Philippines, neutral Ireland and German-occupied France during WWII.

Palmer added there are many "hidden meanings" within his new book alluding to his experiences growing up in Antigonish.

On the last night of the conference about six authors ended up in one of the cabins made available for artists to practice their craft, Palmer said.

"There was a grand piano in the cabin we were in and we sat around listening to C.R. Avery and Mark Berube, multi-faceted, award-winning musicians, play the piano and sing. We all joined in too, but my singing voice wasn't meant to be heard so I stayed quiet and just enjoyed listening to them all sing."