

Nomination of Harry Bruce

2011 Atlantic Journalism Awards
Category: Lifetime Achievement Award

Harry Bruce is one of Canada's preeminent men of letters. A journalist, whose roots in Nova Scotia stretch back to the late 18th century, he has inspired more than a generation of writers and broadcasters with his incisive reporting, masterful prose, thoughtful commentary, and peerless editing – both trenchant and generous.

Born in Toronto, he was educated at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B., and the London School of Economics. His father was the poet, novelist and newspaperman, Charles Bruce.



Harry landed his first job in journalism in 1955 as a beat reporter for the *Ottawa Journal*, covering community affairs. "It was a grueling business," he once recalled for *Halifax Magazine*. "When you were a junior on those newspapers, in those days, they liked to print pictures of everybody who had died accidentally or violently. So, if some child drowned, you were immediately sent to his house. You would knock on the door and ask for his picture."

By the early 1960s, Harry was back in Toronto working for *Maclean's* magazine, then considered the hottest shop for long-form journalism in the country. His comrades included the likes of Pierre Berton, June Callwood, Robert Fulford, Christina McCall, Barbara Moon, Ken Lefolli and Peter Gzowski. Within this august group, he began to craft his signature style, which some described as "springy, tight, wry and witty" and others as simply "personal journalism". Still, he once insisted, "I was never assigned anything as personal journalism. I began to work it in here and there. Then people would say, 'That's what I want.'"

Indeed, people did want that. During the 1960s, Harry accepted positions of increasing editorial authority and journalistic scope, and earned, in the process, a national reputation for coherent reporting, elegant writing and penetrating editing. He was, successively, managing editor of *Saturday Night*, editor of *The Canadian* and columnist for *The Star Weekly*.

Perhaps the best example of his belle lettrist musings during this time was a series of personal essays he wrote for his friend and colleague Peter Gzowski (who had become managing editor of the *Toronto Star*). These were assembled in the 1968 collection, *The short happy walks of Max Macpherson*, a work one reviewer described as a tour de force, which "transformed grimy beer parlours and back alleys into places of mystery and nostalgic beauty."

By 1971, Harry was hankering for his Maritime roots (his father was born and raised in rural Nova Scotia, the product of several generations of Scots separated from

the old country), and during this decade he wrote extensively for both national and regional newspapers and magazines, and briefly anchored CBC-TV Halifax's supertime current affairs program.

In 1979, he became the founding editor of *Atlantic Insight Magazine*. The following year, under his direction, it won the Outstanding Achievement Award of the National Magazine Awards Foundation.

In the 1980s, he took over first as editor of the *Dalhousie Alumni Magazine* and then as editor of the *Atlantic Salmon Journal*. Lightning struck again, and again. Both publications earned individual awards for excellence, thanks to his writing, editing and editorial administration, in their categories in North America-wide competitions.

Then and now, Harry produces work that continues to cement his reputation as one of the country's finest and most influential writers, as well as a true Maritime son. *The Concise Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (2001) had this to say about him: "Bruce became an impassioned advocate for the [East Coast] and an essayist of great charm and perception. Established in Nova Scotia, he published a stream of pieces that made his reclaimed region and his own life into one subject. Bruce's essays can be read as an enactment of the romance of Canadian regional longing."

Over the past 50-plus years, every major Canadian newspaper and magazine has published Harry's columns or stories. He has won four Atlantic Journalism Awards, two National Magazine Awards, and the award of the Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) for "best writer in the dramatic mode in radio" and numerous provincial awards for writing.

What's more, he's a stunningly successful author of 16 books. His *Lifeline: The Story of the Atlantic Ferries and Coastal Boats* (1977) won the first Evelyn Richardson Memorial Literary Award for best non-fiction book by a Nova Scotian. His *The Man and the Empire: Frank Sobey* (1985) was runner-up for the first National Business Book Award. And his *Down Home: Notes of a Maritime Son* (1988) won not only the first City of Dartmouth Book Award, but the first annual Booksellers' Choice Award of the Atlantic Provinces Booksellers' Association.

Twenty years after winning the Evelyn Richardson prize, Harry won it again, this time for *An Illustrated History of Nova Scotia* (1997). He also wrote *The Pig That Flew: The Battle to Privatize Canadian National* (1997) and *Never Content: How Mavericks and Outsiders Made a Surprise Winner of Maritime Life* (2002), winner of a Certificate of Merit in the competition for the 18th National Business Book Award.

Harry's most recent book, published in 2009, is *Page Fright: Foibles and Fetishes of Famous Writers*. He calls it "The Book of Revelations about writers. . .It had been brewing in my head for half a century."

His publisher Doug Gibson calls it "Musical. . .If you read it aloud, it is a very pleasing experience. The prose sings."

Indeed, it does, just as virtually everything Harry has written, edited and otherwise composed in his long and extraordinarily accomplished career at the top of the journalist's craft. His has been a true lifetime of achievement.

Recommendations for Harry Bruce

2011 Atlantic Journalism Awards

Category: Lifetime Achievement Award

Robert Fulford writes:

For more than half a century, Harry Bruce has lived the history of the Maritimes. And his readers have lived it vicariously through the medium of his superbly evocative prose.

He's a reporter, a commentator and on many occasions an eloquent essayist. He's shared his insights on everything from the Atlantic coastal boats to the early years of the Neptune Theatre. He's at his best on the people of the Maritimes, their heritage and how he's seen their society develop. For that reason, Bruce's *Down Home: Notes of a Maritime Son* (1988) is one of the essential books on Canada.

If life in the Maritimes is the great subject of his career, the writing life is a rewarding secondary theme. He writes with wry precision on the evolution of language and in his recent book, *Page Fright* (2009), he's given us a fascinating survey of how writers, past and present, get their work done.

Bruce, a national figure in Canadian journalism since the 1960s, seems to me the ideal candidate for this award. – **Robert Fulford**, January 17, 2012

Robert Fulford is a renowned Toronto author, journalist, broadcaster, and editor. He writes a weekly column for The National Post and is a frequent contributor to Toronto Life, Canadian Art, and CBC radio and television. In 1984, Fulford was named an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Silver Donald Cameron writes:

I've known and admired Harry Bruce for well over forty years, and I can't think of anyone better qualified for a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Atlantic Journalism Awards.

As editor, columnist, book author, TV host and feature writer, Harry has done it all – and done it all well. He's a fearless commentator, a piercing observer, and a honey-smooth stylist, one of the most elegant ever to practice his craft in this country.

I remember Peter Gzowski once remarking that Harry Bruce and Mordecai Richler were the finest writers in the country – high praise from a well-qualified judge of such matters.

Equally important – to me, at least – is the power of his example. He's been a self-sustaining professional journalist for more than half a century, an inspiration to all those who aspire to support themselves by their skill and intelligence. It's also important to note the contribution of his life companion, his wife Penny, the essential other half of Team Bruce. I suspect Harry would be the first to say that without Penny, he couldn't possibly have accomplished what he has. And that marriage – itself a lifetime achievement – underscores something else I value profoundly about Harry Bruce: his character.

Uncompromising though he has sometimes had to be, Harry is essentially a gentleman, to use a word no longer in fashion. He is a profoundly honest and caring man, and I deeply appreciate those qualities in his writing.

For me, Harry has been a professional model, a valued colleague, a treasured friend. He's produced an enviable body of work, and conducted himself in his professional life with generosity and grace. If that doesn't warrant a Lifetime Achievement Award, what would? – **Silver Donald Cameron**, January 19, 2012

Silver Donald Cameron's award-winning work includes plays, films, radio and TV scripts, magazine articles and books, including two novels. Dr. Cameron, who is based in Halifax, also served as the first Dean of the School of Community Studies at Cape Breton University (formerly, the University College of Cape Breton).

Bill Belliveau writes:

Harry Bruce's journalism career began at the ripe old age of 20, when he joined the *Ottawa Journal* as a cub reporter. By the early 1960s Harry was working for *Macleans*'s magazine, then considered the hottest magazine in the country, with a crew of ambitious writers and editors including: Pierre Berton, June Callwood, Robert Fulford, Christina McCall, Barbara Moon, Ken Lefolii and Peter Gzowski, among others. In the past 50 years, Harry has written articles and columns for every major Canadian newspaper and magazine in the country. His achievements include 16 books and numerous journalism awards, both regional and national.

Few people would remember that Harry was the founding Editor of *Atlantic Insight Magazine* launched in late 1979. In 1980, the magazine won three national awards, including the coveted Outstanding Achievement Award from the National Magazine Awards Foundation of Canada. The magazine was created to celebrate the people and happenings of Atlantic Canada, a void that had been created by the indifference of national media and the monopolies of Atlantic Canada. It was the competitive force of *Atlantic Insight* that influenced significant changes at *Macleans*'s. It grew from nothing to become the third-largest circulation magazine in all Atlantic Canada behind only *Reader's Digest* and *Chatelaine* and greater than both *Time* magazine and *Macleans*'s.

Harry is a gentleman and one of the most important Canadian writers and editors of his generation. I am proud to nominate him for the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2011 Atlantic Journalism Awards. – **Bill Belliveau**, January 19, 2012

Bill Belliveau is a Moncton, N.B., communications consultant and former advertising agency owner. He was the founding publisher of Atlantic Insight Magazine.

Dawn Chafe writes:

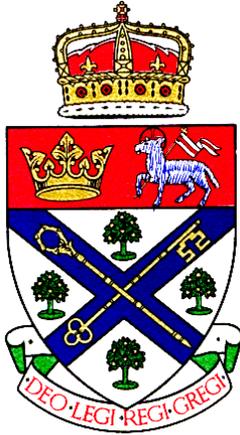
I am now on my sixth draft of this letter in support of Harry Bruce's nomination for the AJA's 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award. The previous handful of drafted notations were deleted for what I thought, at first, were excessive commendations.

I now realize there is no getting around it, no way to say it any less, no manner of avoiding what you may falsely conclude is hyperbolic admiration: Harry Bruce exemplifies excellence in his craft.

As a magazine editor and narrative journalist, he long ago set the standard to which every successive Atlantic Canadian long-form writer worth even the teensiest pinch of salt must necessarily aspire. Since launching his storied career more than 50 years ago, Harry Bruce's efforts have received widespread national and international acclaim: an Outstanding Achievement Award for *Atlantic Insight* from the National Magazine Awards Foundation in 1980 and North American awards of excellence for *Dalhousie Alumni Magazine* and the *Atlantic Salmon Journal*. He's also been recognized for his journalistic endeavours on several occasions by the Atlantic Journalism Awards.

More important than the awards, however, is the impact of his work. From revealing boardroom foibles to calling community leaders to task to shedding wondrous light on overlooked political transgressions, Harry Bruce has consistently provoked and entertained generations of readers with his perceptive, witty narrative renderings. And, at 77, he continues to churn out an enviable body of work. He is, in short, a one-man tour de force and I can think of no one more deserving of this honour. – ***Dawn Chafe***, January 19, 2012

St. John's-based Dawn Chafe is Executive Editor of Atlantic Business Magazine, one of the most respected and decorated publications in the Atlantic Provinces. Over the past two decades, Chafe has won numerous regional, national and international awards for her reporting and writing.



University of King's College
School of Journalism

Stephen Kimber writes:

I'm delighted to write this note in support of Harry Bruce's nomination for the Atlantic Journalism Award's Lifetime Achievement Award. I can think of few who deserve the honour more.

I first met Harry in the early seventies after he'd moved to Halifax from Toronto. I'd known of him, of course. As a young, would-be Halifax writer, I'd read – and tried, without success, to copy – his wonderfully personal style in the many columns and features he wrote for national magazines like *Maclean's*, *Saturday Night* and the *Star Weekly*.

His decision to relocate to Nova Scotia – and his subsequent success as a freelance writer here writing primarily about Atlantic Canadian subjects for regional and national audiences – served as an inspiration for a generation of young writers who wanted to do the same. He was a generous and helpful mentor to many, including me. His journalistic accomplishments are many, and stretch far beyond his own prodigious collection of local, regional and national magazine articles and newspaper columns.

He has written award-winning nonfiction books on everything from his love affair with Nova Scotia to the life and times of famous Prince Edward Island author Lucy Maud Montgomery. His candid biographies of leading Atlantic Canada-based entrepreneurs – Roy Jodrey, Frank Sobey, etc. – have made an important contribution to the history of business in Atlantic Canada. And his *An Illustrated History of Nova Scotia* not only brought the province's long history to life for contemporary readers but it also earned him his second Evelyn Richardson Award for Nonfiction at the 1997 Atlantic Book Awards.

Harry's contributions to the development of the Atlantic Canadian magazine industry are equally significant. In 1979, he was the founding editor of *Atlantic Insight*, which I believe is still the best – and certainly the most popular – magazine to have ever come of this region. Though it didn't ultimately survive, many of the writers, editors and publishers *Insight* spawned have become key players in today's Atlantic Canada

magazine business. All of them owe at least part of their success to the example Harry Bruce provided as editor of the magazine.

“The world of east coast magazine publishing is a small one,” noted the *Ryerson Review of Journalism* in a March 2003 look at the state of regional magazine publishing, “and most of the people associated with it have ties to *Atlantic Insight*, the award-winning monthly (it earned 13 writing awards, including three gold and four silvers, from the National Magazine Awards Foundation) that was published from 1979 to 1989.”

It is time for the Atlantic Journalism Awards to recognize Harry Bruce’s lifetime of achievement and contribution to journalism in this region – and country. – **Stephen Kimber**, January 20, 2012

Stephen Kimber is the Rogers Communications Chair in Journalism at the University of King’s College in Halifax. He is an award-winning writer, editor and broadcaster, and the author of one novel, Reparations, and eight non-fiction books.

HARRY
BRUCE

"This is a writer's book about writing, wonderfully entertaining for those who write or hope to write, and also for anybody who likes to read! It tells more about the creative process than a dozen academic textbooks, and makes for delightful browsing."

EDWARD O. WILSON, biologist and Pulitzer Prize winner

PAGE FRIGHT

FOIBLES AND FETISHES OF FAMOUS WRITERS



HARRY BRUCE



PAGE FRIGHT



M&S

It's no surprise that Mark Twain rejected the "new-fangled" type-writing machine. Writers have always been faithful to whatever worked for them, to whatever kept the words coming, filling the scary blank page or screen. The writing process is mysterious to them and the tricks they have used through the ages have defied logic. But these tricks have provided the world with literature – and now, thanks to Harry Bruce, with this fascinating book.

"This is a splendid feast of literary lore, wonderfully readable and quite amazingly comprehensive. Chronicling the physical act of writing, from the age of papyrus scrolls to the world of computers, Harry Bruce focuses on the endearing quirks and bizarre obsessions that are part of the profession of literature. He's written a book for every writer and for any reader who ever dreamt of becoming one."

ROBERT FULFORD

"Harry Bruce, a professional writer for more than half a century, is still mystified about the process of writing. So are all the other writers – from the authors of the Gilgamesh epic to Michael Ondaatje – whose tools, techniques, eccentricities and superstitions Bruce surveys in this fascinating volume."

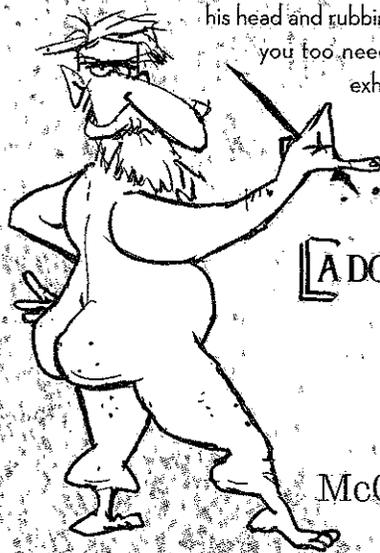
SILVER DONALD CAMERON

"Harry Bruce has fashioned an essential book that is invaluable for any writer facing deadlines, the absence of sobriety, writer's block, an unexpected outbreak of leprosy, or any of the myriad excuses we scribblers use to postpone the agonizing ecstasy of completing our work. Buy it. Read it. And stop procrastinating."

PETER C. NEWMAN

"Okay, so you knew that Truman Capote wrote only in bed, and you knew that Friedrich Schiller could only write if the drawer in his desk was full of rotten apples, and perhaps you even knew that Balzac never drank less than 50 cups of coffee per writing day – but did you know that Victor Hugo wrote his novels bare-naked in a glass cage affixed to the roof of his house, occasionally pouring pails of cold water over his head and rubbing his torso with gloves made of horsehair? No, I thought not. So you too need to read this utterly fascinating, sometimes downright scary, exhaustively researched compendium of writers' lifestyles."

ANDREAS SCHROEDER



[A DOUGLAS GIBSON BOOK]

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