

east word



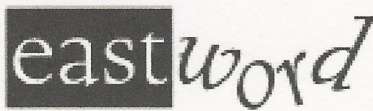
Binnie Brennan (left) and Joan Payzant.

Joan Murray Payzant

Binnie Payzant Brennan

The Nova Scotia writing community is richer for having had Joan Murray Payzant as one of its most long-standing, prolific, and enduring members. Joan was a founding member of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia, and with her keen and abiding interest in local history, she enriched our literature with her vision and her stories. Joan died on August 14, 2013.

I come from a family of storytellers, and one of my favourites was my aunt Joan Payzant. For as far back as my memory will reach, I can recall her stories – family lore, Nova Scotia history, and tales of high seas adventures on Halifax harbour – usually laced with humour and accompanied by her warm laughter.



WRITERS' FEDERATION OF NOVA SCOTIA
ISSN 1187 3531
1113 MARGINAL ROAD
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA B3H 4F7
TEL: 902-423-8116
FAX: 902-422-0881
WWW.WRITERS.NS.CA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: JONATHAN MEAKIN
E-MAIL: DIRECTOR@WRITERS.NS.CA
COMMUNICATIONS & DEVELOPMENT OFFICER:
ROBIN SPITTAL
E-MAIL: PROGRAMS@WRITERS.NS.CA
MENTORSHIP & OUTREACH OFFICER:
SUE GOYETTE
E-MAIL: EVENTS@WRITERS.NS.CA
COMMUNICATIONS & EDUCATION OFFICER:
HEIDI HALLETT
E-MAIL: WITS@WRITERS.NS.CA
EASTWORD EDITOR: PEGGY AMIRAULT

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I first came to know Joan's writing through the publication of *Like a Weaver's Shuttle*, co-written with her husband, my uncle Pete Payzant (and Nimbus Publishing's first publication), and through her self-published *Who's a Scaredy-cat!*, at last count in its ninth printing and a classic in the Halifax Explosion literary canon. I was in awe of her curiosity, her tenaciousness, and the simple elegance of her writing.

When I began writing stories of my own, Joan was among the first to offer her experience and encouragement. Her support meant the world to me as I navigated the insecurities familiar to any emerging writer dealing with the business of submissions and rejections. She always had good ideas, and was happy to share her thoughts about writing, particularly her exasperation with the semi-colon (something I used rather a lot in those days).

Joan Murray Payzant enjoyed a professional career – and I'll quote her obituary – "... as a teacher, both in Dartmouth and briefly in Montreal (indeed she was a brilliant teacher, who influenced countless young people) ... Joan was a prolific and enthusiastic writer for most of her adult life. She wrote children's fiction (*Crumbs*, and *Who's a Scaredy-cat!*) but much of her work centred on the history of Dartmouth and Halifax. From 1979-1983 she wrote a column for the *Dartmouth Free Press*. Her first serious historical work was *Like a Weaver's Shuttle: A History of the Halifax-Dartmouth Ferries* which she co-wrote with Pete. This won the WFNS' Evelyn Richardson Memorial Non-Fiction Award in 1980. Other works include *Halifax, Cornerstone of Canada*, *Second to None: A History of Public Education in Dartmouth, NS*, *We Love to Ride the Ferry*, and (with Janet Kitz) *December 1917: Revisiting the Halifax Explosion*. She also wrote two family biographies, both privately printed."

Joan's generosity, gentle humour, and curiosity carried on through her illness. During my last visit with her in hospital, she was keenly interested to hear about my latest writing project, and she asked me questions and offered her thoughts about it. She then told me a story that left us both giggling. I wish I could have told her a week later that my writing project had found a publisher; instead I found myself at her memorial gathering, surrounded by Joan's family and friends at the Shubenacadie Interpretive Centre. The place was packed.

Joan Payzant's contribution to Nova Scotia's literary life, and the gift of her stories, is formidable. That, and the fact that I have managed to keep my use of the semi-colon in this article down to merely one, is a testament to her influence. ■