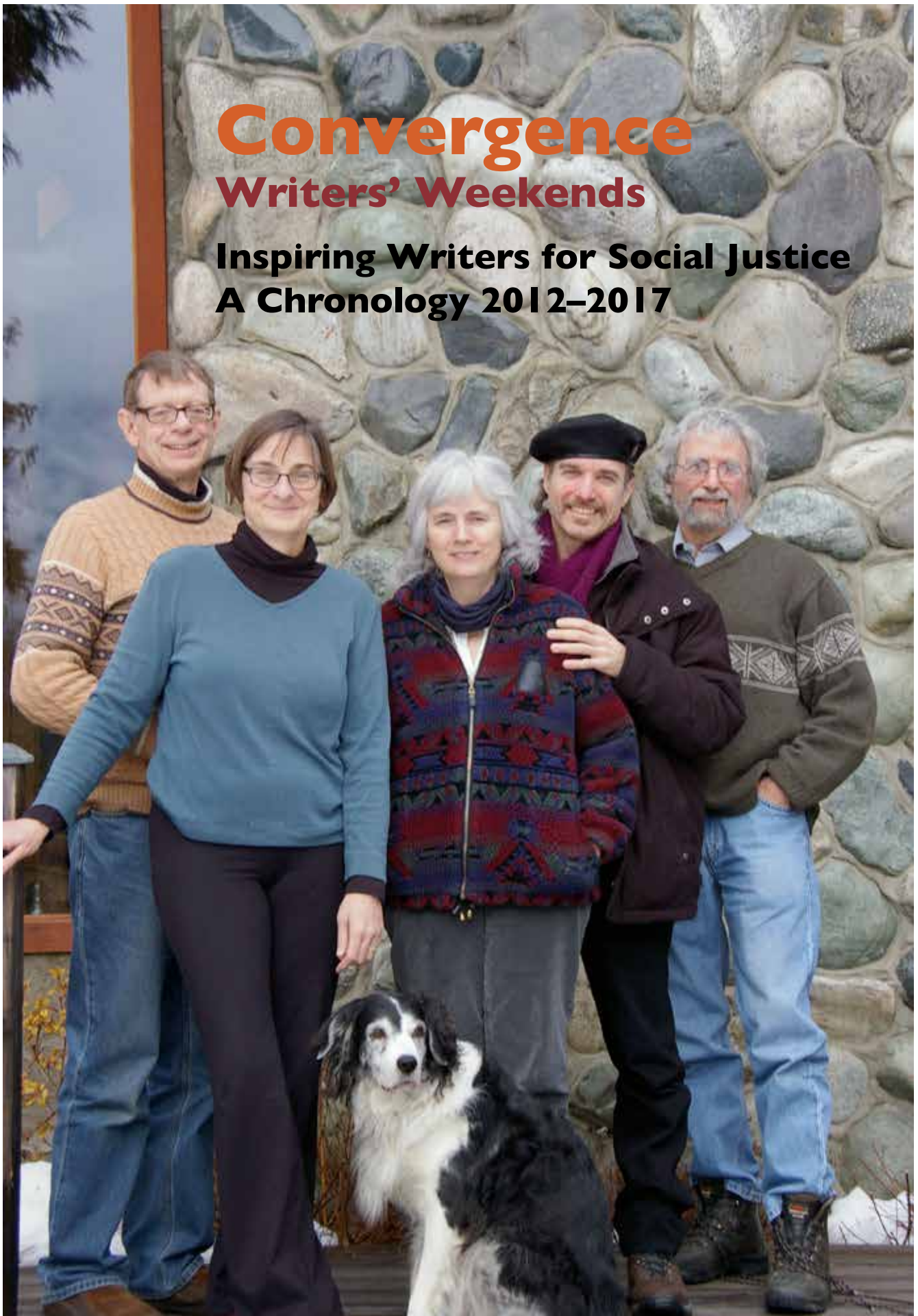


Convergence

Writers' Weekends

**Inspiring Writers for Social Justice
A Chronology 2012–2017**



Convergence: 'Writing As If Compassion Mattered'

Sean Arthur Joyce

"Stories are the sacred wood where our ceremonies of belief take place."

—J. Edward Chamberlin

"Just like a series of smaller streams that feed into one great river, Convergence brings together writers who care about the state of the world and believe writing is a tool to envision and articulate a new future. This weekend Convergence offers presentations, workshops, and dialogue to help writers effectively craft poetry and prose, moving from despair and dystopia to a re-imagined world." —early Convergence brochure

In a few words, the above paragraph is what Convergence Writers' Weekends are all about. Even more succinctly, the idea behind Convergence, is

"writing as if compassion mattered," borrowing from **E.F. Schumacher's** classic book *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. When I envisioned the idea for Convergence, I wanted an event that would go beyond the standard writers' conference and delve deeply into writing that has the capacity to inspire and motivate people for positive social and environmental action. That can come in a well-crafted poem, a moving passage of fiction, an investigative work of nonfiction, and even a rant, with its ancient echoes of theatrical performance. Fortunately, we were sowing seeds on fertile ground: one of the primary capacities a writer must have is a sense of empathy, the ability to imaginatively put yourself inside the 'other.'

In order to create a new future, we must first be able to envision it. That's where our writers and artists come in. But having a vision is one thing, realizing it is something else altogether. As can be appreciated from the daily flood of dismay that floods into our lives through the media, it can be a monumental personal challenge to stay committed to social progress. Beyond the technical tools of the writer's trade, what is equally needed is a spiritual dimension which aids writers to overcome the malaise and despair that often makes it difficult for

them to continue believing in the value of their work in this field.

It's in this context that another critical element

in Convergence came into play: the role of **Rev. George Meier** and **Rev. Dr. Therese DesCamp**, United Church ministers with a decidedly unconventional, progressive approach to spirituality. Therese's studies with cognitive linguistics expert **Dr. George Lakoff** gave us a deeper foundation for training writers in the effective use of language. **George Meier's** training in conflict resolution and other pastoral skills gives him the keen sensitivity to the role of spirituality in everything humans do. When we first met they were owners of Heart's Rest Retreat Centre in New Denver, a beautiful, custom-built home designed with a cathedral-like space for community events. It was the perfect fit for the Convergence vision until the time came for us to move to other venues.

"A working retreat should open doors in your mind that you didn't even know were closed. This retreat did this and more!"

—Kathy Hartley, Convergence 2012

As so many environmental writers have said before, we are not *apart* from nature, we *are* nature. Being in an idyllic location on the mountainous shores of Slo-can Lake is a constant reminder of this fact, an immersion that can't help but foster renewed creativity in writers. And George and Therese's experience in community building made clear to us that unless the heart and spirit are engaged, the motivation to tackle momentous issues can easily collapse.

Having renowned Canadian poet, teacher and author **Tom Wayman** on our team has been an asset beyond price. His nearly 50 years of experience mentoring aspiring writers in universities and colleges in Western Canada grants him an acute insight, not just into language, but into what makes people tick. Tom's administrative experience and skill as a fundraiser has given my original vision the nuts and bolts it needed to succeed in the real world. **Anne Champagne**, with her peerless abilities as a professional copy editor and secretary, has also kept the wheels on the wagon. Her experience as personal assistant to the late **Colleen McCrory**, winner of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize, has proven invaluable to Convergence. It was Anne who first brought my idea to a community brainstorming session hosted by George and Therese. A vision is only as good as the people that serve it, and in the case of Convergence, we are well served indeed.

Learning & Adapting: 2014–2015

The advantage of a small, grassroots organization is that it can move swiftly in response to on-the-ground changes and challenges. When enrollment for our 2014 Convergence, 'Writing the Wild,' fell below our minimum required to break even, the committee decided to cancel the event and regroup. We decided to spend 2015 'retooling' and planning for 2016, scaling it down from a full weekend event to a one evening, one-day event and reducing the tuition fee. (As our

“The highlights for me were: the chance to be amongst people who thought deeply and creatively about big issues and who sought means of relevant expression; the setting—being able to camp and kayak on the lake and walk up to the community hall and share meals; and the accessibility both in terms of place and cost.”

—Jan Inglis, Convergence 2017

location is somewhat geographically isolated, much of our audience is based within 200 kilometres, and the region is known for having lower than average median income.) It also became clear to us that catering meals and acting as an accommodations provider for registrants was beyond the scope of our small committee.

If the response to our next Convergence in 2016, 'Spirit in the Landscape,' was anything to go by, we clearly did something right. Attendance boomed again to well over our minimum threshold, thanks in part to the draw of iconic Canadian author **Sharon Butala**. The fees were more affordable for locals and the shorter duration of the event suited peoples' busy lifestyles. Our registrant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. We followed in 2017 with this format, again having no trouble filling up our optimal group size of 25+ registrants. And onward we go!



Singer-songwriter Dominique Fraissard performs at Heart's Rest Retreat Centre, New Denver, Convergence 2012.

Convergence 2012: 'Writing for Social Change'

Tom Wayman, 'You Think That's Funny? Humour and Social Change Writing.' Since everybody loves a good laugh, humour is often the best way to disarm critics and open dialogue. Poet, author and teacher Tom Wayman showed writers why it's important not to overlook this part of our toolkit.

Verna Relkoff, 'You Talking To Me? The Audience for Writing'

Relkoff is a Nelson author, educator and editor who discussed how our approach to writing can best reach the audience we're seeking. Learn how to get beyond 'preaching to the choir.'

Judy Wapp, 'And If You Don't Like It, I Really Don't Care: The Rant in Theory and Practice' Wapp is a New Denver visual artist and writer with an affinity for the time-honoured

tradition of the rant. While the rant has fallen into academic disfavour in recent decades, workshop participants learned why it remains an effective tool for social justice writers.

Dr. Therese DesCamp, 'The Role of Metaphor.' DesCamp studied at the University of

Berkeley, California with cognitive linguistics expert **George Lakoff**. By explaining recent developments in neurological science and how humans

use metaphor to convey 'frames' or values systems, DesCamp helped writers see the importance of this writers' tool. Writers were given a wider context for a technique often used in writing but seldom examined for its effectiveness in reaching people 'where they live'—their values. Equally important was a discussion of how to avoid reinforcing values we feel are destructive

"This retreat will stay with me for a lifetime, thank you."
—Laurel Walton, constituency assistant to MP Alex Atamanenko



Convergence has as its setting the lovely Slocan Lake, nestled in Valhalla Provincial Park, an ideal location for writers and activists to recharge and be inspired.

by ‘buying into’ the wrong metaphors.

Dominique Fraissard, Singer-Songwriter:

Dominique entertained Convergents with his passionate blend of sensitivity and social justice. An accomplished songwriter, he has released five albums and composed film soundtrack music.

Sean Arthur Joyce, ‘From Rant to Slant: The Political in Poetry.’

Joyce chose two commonly used writing techniques: the rant, an empathy or personification technique; and the mytho-poetic, illustrated with examples. In the talk’s conclusion the question was asked: “What difference does it make?” This was fundamental to the core of the Convergence Writer’s Retreat program of helping writers to see how their work

makes a difference both at a personal and community level. By emphasizing the role of empathy, Joyce offered perspective on what it means to get ‘results’ from social justice writing.

The Spiritual Dimension

This session was held in the form of an informal discussion with all participants present. Co-facilitators **Therese DesCamp** and **George Meier** asked writers to recall moments in their lives when they reached a critical ‘turning point’ and consider what elements helped them through the stresses and strains. “What helped sustain you through this period?” was one of the key questions. Time was allowed for reflection and writing to ponder the question.



Award-winning author Alanna Mitchell presents at Heart's Rest Retreat Centre, New Denver, spring 2013.

Convergence 2013: 'Writing a New World'

Alanna Mitchell, author of the international bestseller *Sea Sick: The Global Ocean in Crisis*, was the key presenter and mentor during this year's Convergence weekend. She was named best environmental journalist in the world by the World Conservation Union and the Reuters Foundation in 2000. Mitchell specializes in investigating changes to the earth's life support systems and travels the world in search of people at the centre of what's going on. She was also featured in an author presentation at the Nelson United Church as part of Convergence 2013.

Sean Arthur Joyce presented 'The Call of the Ancestors: Justice for Past, Present and Future.' Based on research for his book, *Laying the Children's Ghosts to Rest* (Hagios Press

2014), this session explored the role of writers in the process of uncovering the truth, promoting justice, and preserving the 'history of the tribe.' Joyce is the author of 3 books of poetry and 3 of history, with a forthcoming novel, *Mountain Blues* (NeWest Press) due out in May 2018.

Almeda Glenn Miller is the author of the novel *Tiger Dreams* (Raincoast 2002) and the poetry collection *begin with the corners* (Big Bad Wolf Press 2014). Her short stories, essays, and poetry have appeared in *Prism International*, *Grain*, *Dandelion*, etc. She teaches in Selkirk College's Creative Writing program and lives in Rossland, BC. Miller was one of our workshop instructors for Convergence 2013.



2013 Convergents enjoy a spirited discussion. Bottom row, L to R: Tom Wayman, Alanna Mitchell, youth delegate Cypress Hunder-Rookes, Verna Relkoff, and Almeda Glenn Miller.

Editor and writing instructor Verna Relkoff lives in Nelson, BC where she has taught Creative Writing at Kootenay School of the Arts and the Nelson Fine Art Centre. She is the author of *Cul De Sac* (Hag Papers—an imprint of Underwhich Editions). Her poetry has also appeared in *Spindrift*, *Grain* and *Horsefly*. She also served as an editor and literary agent with Mint Literary Agency. Verna was on the steering committee for Convergence and was one of the workshop instructors for our 2013 event.

Author and writing instructor Tom Wayman's books include poetry (*Dirty Snow*, 2012), fiction (the novel *Woodstock Rising*, 2009) and nonfiction (*Songs Without Price*, 2008). He

has taught writing widely in North America, including at Nelson's David Thompson University Centre and the Kootenay School of the Arts, and most recently at the University of Calgary 2002–2010. Wayman was one of our workshop instructors for Convergence 2013.

“You people did an amazing job. I think all attendees had a wonderful time. And according to an ex-workshop junkie, it was one of the best she'd ever attended, if not the best.”

—Verna Relkoff, instructor



Award-winning author Sharon Butala with Sinixt nation spokesperson Virgil Seymour and Ted Chamberlin, Silverton, BC, June 2016.

Convergence 2016: ‘Spirit in the Landscape’

Sharon Butala, featured author and workshop leader. Sharon’s books have been on the Canadian bestseller lists, including her memoir, *The Perfection of the Morning*, which reached #1 in July 1994 and remained on the list for over a year. More recently, *Lilac Moon* was also on the bestseller lists. Sharon has read all over Canada and in the United States as well as in Mexico, the Czech Republic, and Ireland. She has been a guest at nearly every literary festival in Canada and some US festivals, as well as teaching literally dozens of writing workshops. She is also in demand as a lecturer.

J. Edward Chamberlin, featured author and workshop leader. Chamberlin is University Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto and

visiting professor at the University of Michigan. He was the Senior Research Associate with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and has worked extensively on native land claims around the world. He divides his time between Toronto, Half Moon Bay and Ann Arbor.

Chamberlin was born in Vancouver, and educated at the universities of British Columbia, Oxford and Toronto. Since 1970, he has been on the faculty of the University of Toronto, but his interest in stories and songs has taken him around the world, to the hunters of the Kalahari and the herders of Mongolia as well as to the islands of the Caribbean. He was Poetry Editor of *Saturday Night* magazine, is a Fellow of the Royal Society and an Officer of the Order of Canada. His many books include *If This Is Your Land*,



Author Eileen Delahanty-Pearkes makes a point during the Saturday evening plenary discussion with panelists Sharon Butala, Therese DesCamp, Sean Arthur Joyce, Ted Chamberlin and Virgil Seymour.

Where Are Your Stories? which set the theme for Convergence in 2016.

Virgil Seymour was the appointed spokesperson for the Colville Sinixt nation. He was invited to participate in Saturday evening's panel discussion to honour the ancient presence of the Sinixt nation in the Slocan Valley.

Sean Arthur Joyce is a freelance journalist, author and poet. His social justice activism as a poet has extended to co-founding Poets Against War Canada with **Sandra Stephenson** of John Abbott College Peace Studies in Montreal. With poet **Timothy Shay** he published a fundraising poetry anthology, *Homeless in Paradise*, for a Nelson, BC homeless shelter. He was a contributor to the international poetry anthology *The Book of Hopes and Dreams*, a fundraiser for child victims of war in Afghanistan. His most recent book of poems, *The Price of Transcend-*

ence (2015) is described by **Tom Wayman** as "a first-rate collection." Joyce's activism coincided with historical research in *Laying the Children's Ghosts to Rest: Canada's Home Children in the West* (Hagios Press 2014).

Rev. Dr. Therese DesCamp is a retreat leader, spiritual director, writer, and community-based pastor. Ordained in 1993 by the United Church of Christ (US), she now serves the United Church of Canada. Therese received a PhD in Biblical Studies with a concentration in cognitive linguistics in 2004 from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. She has taught graduate school, served as a pastor, been an advocate for people with disabilities and run a retreat centre. Her writing includes articles for academic and popular publications, a scholarly book on cognitive linguistics and biblical studies, and occasional blog posts. Therese is a founding member of the Slocan Lake Stewardship Society.



Award-winning poet and author Gary Geddes and author Carolyn Pogue, Convergence 2017, New Denver, BC, June 2017.

Convergence 2017: ‘We Will Not Be Separated’

Carolyn Pogue believes that pens are indeed mightier than swords and that words can help heal and transform us. Her work includes world travel, support for Indigenous justice, co-founding The Art of Peace: A Camp for Kids and Ecology North, presenting writing workshops for writers aged 10 to 100, and writing several books, both fiction and nonfiction. Her latest publications are *Sorry: Why our Church Apologized* (follow-up to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and *Rock of Ages: A Cosmic Love Story* (about the oldest rock on Earth). Carolyn writes her ‘Sightings’ column for *The United Church Observer* online twice each month. The descendant of a British Home Child, she

has also written two Young Adult novels on this little-known aspect of Canadian history, *Gwen* and *West Wind Calling*.

The **Write the Spirit** workshop encouraged seasoned and beginning writers to explore how the world is and how the world can be. Using ‘free fall’ writing, discussion and a variety of exercises we explored some possibilities for peace, justice and healing within ourselves, our country and our planet. Writers worked in any genre they chose. We shared experiences, created and recreated stories that encourage us to help to heal our troubled world.



Convergence 2017 registrants Annie Ferncase (L) and author Judy Wapp read their work, New Denver, BC, June 2017.

Gary Geddes is a renowned Canadian poet, writer and teacher who's written or edited 50 books and won a dozen national and international literary awards. His latest book of poems, *The Resumption of Play*, is a narrative sequence that explores both the injustice of Canada's Indian Residential Schools and the much-neglected long poem form. Workshop participants learned from Geddes how political poetry and prose can also be well-crafted and breathtakingly beautiful.

Registrants in Gary's poetry workshop learned about line breaks, how to make a poem nest in the ear without depending on rhyme and metrics, and how to turn a local image into a structural component in the poem. "I'd like to show

you how to write up a storm... that resonates at the levels of sight, sound and idea."

Those who prefer to explore nonfiction benefited equally from Gary's tutelage. In *Drink the Bitter Root*, he travelled to Rwanda, Uganda, the

Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Somaliland in 'A Search for Justice and Healing in Africa.' His new book, *Medicine Unbundled: A*

Journey Through the Minefields of Indigenous Health Care, draws on four years of research interviewing First Nations Elders about their experience in BC segregated hospitals.

The Saturday session closed with a fascinating group discussion on the event theme.

"Inspiring, more than I expected. High quality writing, very informed discourse. Great conversation. Great fun!"
—2012 Convergence registrant



Authors James Hoggan and Donna Macdonald were the special guest speakers at Convergence 2018, held in Silverton, BC June 15 and 16.

Convergence 2018: ‘Keeping a Civil Tongue’

“Writing carries a message about our values, intended or not,” said Convergence co-founder **Therese DesCamp** in her introductory remarks to this year’s event. Finding a way of communicating those values in a constructive manner is a particular challenge for our times, one we felt was important to address.

James Hoggan is a publicist and former chair of the Suzuki Foundation who founded the popular DeSmogBlog, a winner of the Canadian Public Relation Society’s Leadership in Communication Award. His latest book, *I’m Right and You’re an Idiot: The Toxic State of Public Discourse and How to Clean it Up*, set the tone for our event theme this year. He believes

the current trend toward extreme polarities in the social and political sphere is “an incredibly dark and dangerous force that shuts down public discussion.” Hoggan spoke of the “war on objectivity” designed to convince people there are no facts, only opinions. “Public discourse then becomes a battle of ideologies,” he said. Demonizing ‘the other’ only worsens the divide, and for those invested in social justice it’s essential not to give in to the polarization. He quoted Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh, who said, “Speak the truth, but not to punish.” Hoggan said it’s important to recognize that people are dealing with despair and can turn away from civic engagement if they feel marginalized somehow. He advised Convergence registrants to hold their be-



Convergence 2018 reintroduced the performing arts to the program with Tsuneko 'Koko' Kokubo performing her dance routine *Hiroshima* and Sean Arthur Joyce performing *Dead Crow: Prologue* with musician Noel Fudge.

liefly, considering that they could be wrong. “Take a stand and argue for the sake of the discourse itself.”

Donna Macdonald is a 19-year veteran of civic politics, having served as a city councillor in Nelson, BC. Her book, *Surviving City Hall*, recalls the many challenges of keeping a civil tongue while dealing with irate citizens or intransigent colleagues on council. “These people are our neighbours, not our enemies,” she often had to remind herself. Macdonald said she was glad to retire from politics just as social media was gaining ground, injecting an often vicious strain into political discourse. Politics is all about community building, not proving our beliefs right, she said. “We won’t get excellent leaders if people just want to beat up on them.” Her

workshop at Convergence 2018, *Seeking and Keeping Civility*, led participants through a series of exercises demonstrating ways of defusing confrontation by employing civil communication techniques.

Sean Arthur Joyce, author and co-founder of Convergence, hosted a workshop on writing techniques, *From Mundane to Gripping: Mastering Prose*. Joyce explained how using the techniques of the novelist can enliven both fiction and nonfiction to more fully engage the reader. His two most recent books, *Laying the Children’s Ghosts to Rest: Canada’s Home Children in the West* (Hagios Press 2014), and the novel *Mountain Blues* (NeWest Press 2018) both explore issues of social justice, one in the context of Canadian history, the other in a fictional setting.

Convergence Photo Gallery



Ivan Nicholson, youth scholarship winner, 2012.
Photo by Linda Crosfield.



Kaslo writer Robert Banks Foster at Convergence 2012.
Photo by Linda Crosfield.



Convergence co-founder Anne Champagne.



Convergence co-founder George Meier.



Kathy Hartley reads her work at Convergence 2012.
Photo by Linda Crosfield.



Convergence co-founder Therese DesCamp.



Convergence co-founder Sean Arthur Joyce.
Photo by Juscha Grunther.

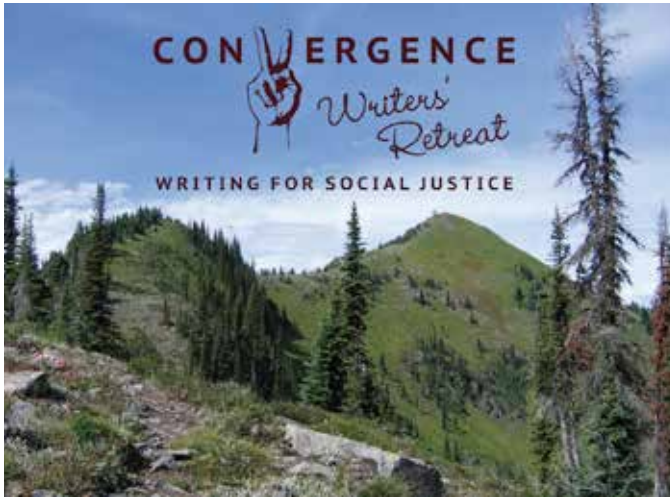
*“The conference was a really great
experience for me.”
—youth delegate Jennifer Rebbetoy,
Convergence 2012*



Convergence co-founder Tom Wayman.

Convergence Funders & Sponsors

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