

Tancook Island
Lunenburg Co., N.S.
February 5, 1957

Dear Mr. Raddall:

I hesitate to write this letter because though I want very much to express my appreciation of your late book, "The Wings of Night", I feel you may be so busy as to grudge even the time and attention required to read my humble opinion and uninteresting remarks. I considered for some time whether to write to you or not. At last I heard mention on the radio of some one writing to an author about his book, and anyway, I reasoned, he may not be as reserved and full of distaste for vulgar contacts as I, in my nervousness, fancy him.

When you glance up at the heading of this letter and see Tancook Island, you will no doubt be astonished and start wondering if the writer of this letter is one of the many Dutch-accented, practical thinking Tancookers you ran into during your visit here to prepare for Maclean's your article about this unique isle. And if you already know the Tancook reaction to your description you will be doubly surprised by this letter. They all seem devoid of a sense of humor in respect to it, and regard an

outsider's plain mention of truths about them as undeserved depreciation. They wanted flattery, I guess. As one woman mournfully remarked, "He made fun of us, even told about the religious pictures in the toilets." I hope I am making you laugh when I write this as I have no worse reason for mentioning it.

I, myself, only read your article last year. When it was first published I did not live here, and when an aunt of mine wrote to me enthusiastically about it, I was not even interested enough to read it. Little did I dream I would, through the fortunes of school-teaching, marry and live there! When I got living here and was reminded of your name by seeing it in the children's readers, I began inquiring, and, after quite an effort, managed to locate a copy of the article which I read and accepted with a totally different attitude than the native Lancasters. Naturally, I suppose. I felt you had done all you could on such a brief acquaintance with the place.

But I have side tracked from my real object in writing which I stated was to tell you how I enjoyed your book. I wish now I had at least written that part of my letter while I was reading the story, as then I could have been most vivid on my impressions of it. I couldn't leave it alone, and didn't exactly bless the henwork that dragged me from the deep pleasure of reading it.

I think what added to its ³ appeal for me was that it is about my own land and environments I am used to and one gets a thrill out of such a bright picture of what is most real to one. And there are so few books about our land!

But aside from that point I enjoyed the dramatic portrayals of character and the fascinatingly apt language. And that brings me to a question which I would like to ask, just in case you are not so lofty as my imagination paints you and should deign to acknowledge this perambule of mine. Does this wonderful ability of original expression come with cultivation or is it already there? You see, I aspire towards writing myself (please bear with me - I will try not to bore you) and that is the score on which I feel most stumped. To find a word not trite is often difficult.

Also I would like to ask your opinion (if you have time to give it) as to where and how one could obtain some guidance towards the saleable preparation of story writing. I cannot type and to pay for the typing of stories without being reasonably sure they would be acceptable could run into more money than I can afford to spend. But how to know when one is on the track or why not, when editors refuse to make comments? I hope perhaps the fact one can recognize greatness is some indication in one's favor.

And now that I have relieved myself of this urge to make my humble tribute to greatness, I will close with thanks to a good writer for his priceless contribution.

Sincerely,
Mrs Viola Levy (Levy)

Mrs Viola Levy,
Tancook Island

February 9, 1957

Dear Mrs. Levy,

Your letter was very interesting. I had not known that anybody on Tancook resented my magazine article. I liked them and I said so. I still look back on my visit there with the greatest of pleasure. I mentioned their accent because I'm interested in such things. Everybody speaks with some sort of accent -- I do myself -- and in Nova Scotia it is often possible to trace ancestry through the speech. Here in Liverpool many people are descended from the New England "Yankees" who settled this place in the eighteenth century. I was surprised to find some of their expressions in use on Tancook, where I had expected nothing but the ~~the~~ so-called Lunenburg Dutch. Also there was a distinct trace of Irish accent in certain families. There was no mystery about it when I looked up the history of Tancook, Blandford and Chester. The answer was right there. This blend of accents and idiom is one of the things that make the people of Tancook a unique community -- and is there anything wrong with being unique?

Now with regard to your writing ambitions. There are correspondence courses in short story writing and there are all kinds of books on the subject. If you drop a line to The Book Room, Chronicle Building, Halifax, they can tell you about the books. I don't know where the correspondence-course people are -- I just know they exist. I never saw a course or opened a book on writing myself. I studied the work of writers I liked, asked myself what it was that I liked about their style and material -- because obviously this appealed to something in myself. After that I began to write stories of the people and scenes I knew, at the same time working out a style that came naturally to me. It took a lot of time and work and patience. I wasn't afraid to use the waste-basket -- and I still throw a lot of work in it if I'm not satisfied. I've never sent an editor anything unless I knew it was the best I could do. This is a hard way to get along but it gives you a reputation with the editors for good workmanship even if they don't like the stories you write, and they'll read carefully everything you send them.

Editors don't like reading hand-written manuscripts. If I were you I'd get a typewriter -- you can get good (re-conditioned) machines from Simpson's or Eaton's at a reasonable price. Then just pick away at it with three or four fingers, as I do. Use business paper (8 inches by 11 $\frac{1}{2}$) one side only, double-spaced (not single spaced like this) with margins at least an inch wide.

The best way to learn to write is to start writing and keep on writing.

Sincerely,

