Sara: Welcome to our first author chat podcast with the Callander Public Library. Tonight we'll be speaking with the author, L:esley Choyce, author of *Broken Man on Halifax Pier*. If you're interested in participating in future author chats, be sure to contact the library, and we'll make sure that you can join us for the next one to ask questions.

Sara: So before we get started I'll just say sort of welcome to everyone, for coming and I'm very happy that you're all here. If anybody else happens to trickle in a little bit later on, then I'll be, I'll let them in and we can catch them up to speed.

So, typically how this works is since we have such a nice small group like this we can sort of shoot out questions and ask Lesley, a little bit more naturally, we don't necessarily have to take turns in any regimented order. But I will recommend, if you're unfamiliar with Zoom, a good tip is if you're not speaking at that moment or don't intend to anytime soon, if you mute your mic then it just makes sure we don't have any extra feedback that we don't need, that sort of thing. Yeah, exactly. So if you want to just so there's no feedback or anything like that.

But otherwise, for anybody who has perhaps not obsessively looked into your history in order to prepare for tonight, Lesley, if you want to run us through a little bit about yourself? That would be lovely.

Lesley: Sure, okay, shall I take it away?

Sara: Ah, yes, go ahead.

Lesley: So, I’m Lesley Choyce, welcome to the eastern shore of Nova Scotia. The fog has just rolled in here we're right on Milestone Lake right adjacent to the lifestyle beach so the ocean is just a stone's throw behind me here. Been a beautiful day. And I guess you know you've read my book, one of them, *Broken Man on a Halifax Pier*, I wrote up a little thing here, it's only about a minute long so I’ll read it.

I've been writing for a long time. This was actually my 99th book, I think that three or four more have been published since then. So, I've got a lot of books that I've done, I’m really, really fortunate as a writer.

I write novels like *Broken Man*, sort of, I guess I think it is, literary or somewhat popular novels for adults. I write young adult novels that have been translated into a lot of different languages. I write books of poetry, a couple of kids books - not many, but a few. And some sort of autobiographical-type books, you know a little bit humorous and tongue-in-cheek kinds of things. And I also run Pottersfield Press, which is separate from my own writing, which goes out to different publishers, but Pottersfield Press is a small publisher here in Nova Scotia, we mostly publish Atlantic writers. So I also teach creative writing at Dalhousie University, and all these things I've been doing for quite a long time so that's why I have so many books out there.

I'm always happiest when I'm writing, so I’m trying to figure out why this week in particular, I was feeling kind of you know, we were all feeling kind of rambley and kind of like there’s something a little bit wrong with the world. But actually the pandemic’s been going great for me because I mostly just, I'm here in my own world where I can write, do my publishing work, get up in the morning, check the waves, go surfing if the waves are good, so I really don't have too much to complain about, but I guess I could pin it down with the fact that I just finished writing a YA novel, and I'm kind of between writing projects, so that always makes me feel a little bit up in the air.

Anyway, welcome to my office, my home on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia. I'm going to read this little thing only because I'm a “getting prepared” kind of guy. It’s kind of a statement about *Broken Man on a Halifax Pier*. And on that I'm thrilled to have the discussion before you even ask me anything.

Here's my little write-up. How could I have written and seen the publication of 99 books? I asked myself that question - really, it does seem odd. After all, I didn't get a book published until when I was 29. So if my math is correct, all were written in the brief space of 39 years.

That's an average of 2.5384615 per year, according to my calculator. So, just for the record, I believe I have six or seven books that I wrote, they're never, they never found a publisher, didn’t get published, and of course I have a few more upcoming projects.

So anyways, so *Broken Man on a Halifax Pier* was number 99. I think it embodies much of what I've learned over the years, writing books that I pour my heart and soul into, as writers like to say - sort of true. It's pure fiction, it's not the story of my life in any way that I can fathom. The setting is the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, where I live. My protagonist, Charles, is himself a struggling writer so I can identify with him on those two counts. And, yes, despite my grandiose numbers, I too am a struggling writer, like any novelist who’s worth his salt, I struggle to get it right, to tell a story that has heart, a story where the reader will truly care about the characters. There’s joy in writing, but after the euphoric first draft there's tedious work, doubt, frustration, blood, sweat and tears - and ultimately the feeling of satisfaction and that small contribution to the grander story of being human.

I did recently ask myself what is the book about?, since I could never answer the question while writing it. I decided it's just a story, and within that story are a few essential truths to what I've learned in my short tenure on this planet. It would be silly for me to try to outright explain everything I discovered in answering this question, But I'll pony up one surprise that I discovered, and that was that when you’re down and out, there will always be someone there who will come to your aid. And that person is quite likely going to be a complete stranger. Here's me, there's a little bit about the book.

Sara: Perfect, thank you. Did anybody want to start off with any questions that they had for Lesley, or while you were reading.

Linda: So Lesley, I loved your book. It certainly- I love the East Coast, that the thing about... my niece married a young man from Antigonish, and so we got to have the wedding there and, you know, meet all sorts of people so... it certainly, the way you wrote it, I really felt like it was, I was down east, you know, with the people there that I've met, and the thing that I - it's interesting that when you just said that when you're down and out, the first person that's going to help you as a stranger, so I'm still trying to process that, because that's really a lovely thought and interesting. But you know that and so this story was so complex, there were so many people that have their own, there could be a story about a lot of the characters, the way that you develop them. The one part of the story that really intrigued me was when he, at the very end, when Charles discovers the love letters that had been kept. They had been kept but they had been given away in the …

Lesley: Was a toolbox.

Linda: Toolbox. I was trying to think of what it was. Toolbox. But then they came back to him, people started bringing things back to him. So in some ways, it was like his father or mother didn't want him to see those love letters, but for some reason they came back to him and then he discovers, of course, that the sacrifices that his father made by going away to work, and how the mother patiently waited for two years for him to save enough money to buy the property, and then they built the house. And then after the mother passes, then he dismantled the house and gives everything away. To me like there's a whole - you could write a whole book about that process. It was so brilliant the way - and it really intrigued me the way that you described that. It was so lovely and and also because, you know, I'm an older woman and my parents, you know, you forget that your parents were young, and had made sacrifices for each other and all of those things. And it reminded me that when my father was in his 90s I was, I used to say to him: “What did you like about mom, when you met her?”, and he would get a big smile on his face and he would say “Everything”, and it was so beautiful to see that because I grew up, the whole time we were growing up, I don't remember him ever saying he loved everything about her, you know, but he remembered that as he was older. So, anyway, that whole part of the story, I thought was a small part but it really, it really touched my heart. So I wonder if you have any comments on that.

Lesley: Yeah, well thanks for breaking that down. Thanks for allowing me to remember that from the novel, it’s out of my head once it's written and published. I, you know, as I listen to you describe it there I remember what I was trying to get at is that, you know, children don't really know their parents, as individuals, or - I had great parents too, my mother and father and they were my mother and father, and you know... to sort of envision before I existed in the world that they has a romance and a life, and you know even especially, like you mentioned, all those sacrifices and things that were made, which kind of get erased. My parents never talked much about that, after, you know, myself and my brother came into the world, so I think I was trying to get at that surprise, especially because Charles was a guy who ran away from home, in essence, I mean he was older, but he just, he just closed the door on that life where he grew up there in this little fishing village. And so this was you know him going back, after being the broken man on the Halifax Pier, in going back to this little rural community, was trying to rediscover his past, reconnect with his past. and especially that thing about the father.

I don't know where I got it from, whether I made it up, or borrowed it, or like writers do, stole the idea from someplace else, you know, the idea that you know once the father, once the mother was gone the father tore down the house and gave the pieces away, so he dismantled his life. And then, Charles comes into the town, and you know, going to that same location and he's rebuilding his own life on that location. I think I just get lucky in telling stories like this that these pieces come in from places. Often I don't know where they come from, maybe I'm borrowing from other stories, or from fragments of stories that other people tell me that I then embellish. I think you'd probably find that everything writers just pick it away, or whatever, you know, comes into our radar at the time we’re writing a story.

Linda: I just - you know you could do a whole book, you know, a prequel to that, because I think it, you know, Charles, as you say, he leaves, because he doesn't want the life that his father had. And then when he has his life, and it doesn't necessarily turn out the way he wants it, he comes back, and creates a life, you know, and then starts to appreciate, you know what his father, you know sacrificed to, you know, to make the life there and then there was some value to it. So anyway, I don't want to monopolize all the time but I just, if you write that book you have to let us know. I'll be wanting to read it, for sure.

Lesley: I will think about that for sure.

Linda: Thank you.

Arlene: Hi, it’s Arlene, can I ask a question? I have not read the book yet. I'm waiting for our library who’s going to get it. But I'm intrigued by your prolific writing, and I'm glad that you sort of talked about how long you've been writing, but as a teenager, was that like a career choice you were thinking of, did it come across to you gradually, or, or suddenly, I'm interested in that sort of thing, what, what got you, gave you the bug?

Lesley: So as a teenager I wanted to be a marine biologist. A Jacques Cousteau. So I first went to university in East Carolina University in North Carolina. I grew up in New Jersey, moved to Canada in 1978, just for the record. A long time ago, but so I went to East Carolina University in North Carolina to study marine biology and discovered that I was really bad at math. And therefore pretty terrible at sciences, but I was good at writing stories and things like that.

Somewhere back, I think in grade six, I had an English teacher or teacher who asked the class to write a story, a short story, fiction. I wrote something and she gave me an F. She said, “You couldn't possibly have written this, it's plagiarized”, and of course I had written it. I couldn't convince her otherwise. She then asked me to rewrite something so I wrote something really kind of sketchy and she gave me a D and she said, “Well see there, that's your lesson”, and I never convinced her otherwise, the original one that she gave me an F, was really my own. But I kind of took that as a cue that maybe this is just something that I'm good at, that, if I work at it I'll get better. So I went through university and graduate school in New York City. So I could teach literature at least in university. I kept writing and I was writing, and wrote two or three full complete manuscripts before I got anything accepted.

And, you know, along the way there I moved to Canada at the time and that's pretty much where it hit. You know, I think there's two things really, the combination of moving to Nova Scotia and immigrating to Canada, and feeling this was precisely the place on the planet where I’m supposed to be. And a lot of what I've written about is set in Nova Scotia. I mean there's the real Nova Scotia, it's here and we have all these same problems that the rest of Canada has, but there's the mythical Nova Scotia, which is a little bit in the *Broken Man* story, and in several of my other novels and that's sort of this idealized mythological place that I've created, you know that's inside my head. So the two fused together, you know, that the writing and the move to Nova Scotia for me, worked out very very well, at least you know my own personal history that goes on in my head.

So, I think that's where the writing is and, you know, as I was hinting at earlier, I'm happier when I'm writing. Not all day, but, you know, if I can get up in the morning, get some surfing for an hour, sit down and write for a couple of hours, you know, get on with other things in my life, that's very much a perfect day for me. So I think to write, you know, being a writer is very much a lifestyle choice, I realized that like most book writers in Canada we probably can just make a living from it. In fact, you know the - I remember the Writers Union in Canada, the income for most of us book writers has dropped, you know, 30-40% in the last five or six years. Canadians are buying more and more books, mostly American, British books, they're buying fewer and fewer Canadian books. I was shocked to notice I didn't realize that that shift had happened somewhere within the 1980s and the 90s, so it's kind of sad that that's the case, I can't say I'm hurting as a result of it, but it is a little bit worrisome that you know there's been that decline. So it's really good to hear about, you know the kind of promotions that the Ontario Library System is doing with the works, and everything, so thanks very much folks in Ontario.

Arlene: Thank you. Now, did you send a copy of your book to the school where you got the F?

Lesley: No, no, this would’ve been back to a school in New Jersey, couldn't do that. This would have been long long ago - I guess it was late 60s, 1960s. So, who knows, that particular teacher was gone. She was a very kind, good teacher, by the way, which is sort of funny, so I clearly forgive her for that and take it hopefully as a positive thing, rather than a negative.

Arlene: You're very generous that way. Thank you.

Sara: Do you think that the sort of decline in the Canadians reading Canadian books has something to do with the sort of impression that Canadian books are almost their own genre, if you know what I mean, like, when you think of Canadian literature, you think of a few very specific examples in a sort of very specific style of writing that seems to be sort of less popular. Do you think that that impression has something to do with the decline?

Lesley: I don’t know, to be honest, I, it's a bit of a mystery to me, so maybe it has something to do with when we become so internationalized because the internet that you know we're less parochial, less you're focusing on our own.

I don't know if I can blame anybody right now but it seemed for a while that all the books winning the awards or the you know the Governor General's awards and prizes and all that so they were very, very serious kinds of books that lacked humor, but I do see that there’s some funny books out there this year.

If any of you are brave enough to tackle a book called Dirty Birds, by his name is somebody Morgan. He's actually from Cape Breton, originally from Saskatchewan, I think. It's a very, very funny book so there's you know there is, you know, the humor out there. So, you know, aside from, you know, that theory I don't know what to say about the state of Canadian literature, there are many many very funny writers producing very fine books.

I know that what's happened because of the pandemic in the last year, it's going to become much, much harder for us writers to find publishers for our books. There's a big change. Publishers have become far more conservative. They're kind of focused on marginalized groups, which is great, you know, because that needs to come around, you know, it's just going to be… I think there's going to be fewer books being published, maybe with big publishers are going to be more conservative and looking for bigger sales rather than a wide range of writers but there, there's my rant.

Mary: I’m Mary. I read your book over two days. Got it on one of those...

Sara: E-reader.

Maary: What is it?

Sara: E-reader.

Mary: Yeah, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I was just, you know, getting bleary eyed, trying to see the print in it. I thought it was excellent. And I think that's what's wrong with a lot of the Canadian stuff. It's just so hopelessly - I shouldn't say that. The Canada Reads stuff that they have, those things are so depressing. You know, if you, if I pick up a book I'd like to pick up something like yours that has a little humor in it has, you know, moves the story along. **I really enjoyed it.**

**Some of these other books, I don't like, and they keep pushing the indigenous stuff on us. “We got to read the indigenous books because by golly, we're Canadian and we've got a you know-”, they're horrible! Have you read any of those? It's all about how horrible they have it. I shouldn't be like this way but the ones that I have, it's all about how terrible their lives are because they were in residential schools or they were living through, you know, horrendous squalor. You know, you can read one of those books once in a while but you want it on a daily basis,** you want to be able to take, be taken into something that's - not necessarily all pleasant but at least has some spirit to it.

And this is what I found in your book. I really enjoyed it. There was one point I thought, “He's taking this too far. You know, I'm gonna lose him in it. And there's too many things here, poor guy,” - I expected the girl to die. I expected her to have some terminal disease at some point. But you went through that and you resolved it. I thought, “He did an excellent job”.

Lesley: Thank you. Just one little commentary about the state in publishing: we probably have to go through this phase in, maybe in the publishing culture and everything where there is, you know, a lot of emphasis on the darker elements of Canadian history that certainly needs to get out there and then we will, we'll move on.

I think, you know, what I know what the history of literature is, you know, there are these, these periods of, you know, intense concentration about certain kinds of stories. I mean, to use a very different example but, you know, certainly a lot of literature coming out of World War Two about the Jewish Holocaust, that sort of thing. I think it just needs to get out there and then, you know... I still prefer the diversity of voices.

All across the board, and funny books, or you know, for me, that when I'm reading, the best books are the ones that are profound in some ways, but I still find myself laughing. You know, one page I’m riveted by some new philosophical thought, meaning of life kind of thing, the next page, I'm laughing at, you know, the absurdity of the situation that the character gets into, so you know I guess I would aspire to that.

If somebody took *Broken Man on a Halifax Pier*, well, you know, is this great literature, what is this all about? Probably not great literature, the way it gets taught at universities, but it's something that - thank you for your comments if you haven't got the book, makes feel good because it held you, the story all the way through. And I recognize the dangers for me as a writer of when I would go too far and we want, you know, there’s those stories where you want to throw down the book and say “Oh my god that's just too much” or, you know, “Does everybody have to die in the book?” But, I guess, you know, problems come up, issues are there, and usually the endings of my books don't have big resolutions to whatever the crisis or the problem is, they might have varied textures of this, it's like we dealt with this, and it's not perfect, and now life goes on.

Mary: Yeah. What is your definition of a book that is, I don't know, what does it have to have for you to think it's a really - book worthy of our attention?

Lesley: It has to have heart and soul, and those are easy. (Unintelligible). You know the writer needs to make me feel that, you know, the writer who's writing it's not just playing a game with me, not just trying to entertain, but that the writer is, in fact, because of the craft that they have of writing, is somehow smarter than me, and has a larger understanding.

And so for me as a writer, this is what I'm always aspiring to. What do I have to offer the world? I'm not any smarter than the next person. I’ve been working on my craft of writing all these years, I've written a whole bunch of books. What do I have to offer people now? Well, I know that entertainment is actually part of it, really should be a part of it. I know that I can make people laugh sometimes. And then I guess the next biggest thing that I can attempt to do is make people care about my characters, they care about the characters enough that we're going to follow the story all the way through. And so, I can't cheat the reader too much by killing off my character, or having some thing that's just absurd happening and that's the ending of the book.

So, but endings, I would have to say is the hardest thing for me and for many other writers, learning how do you know how to end the story. Sometimes I write five six or seven different endings. And then I pick one.

Mary: I have another question I was gonna ask. Do you start out when you write a book, do you start out with a point of view that you're trying to make, make people see some sort of specific thing with, with your writing? Have you got a point to make, with the story?

Lesley: No, I don't have that, that message, you know I don't start out thinking about a message. I write a number of essays. Some of them were like essays that end up in newspapers and that kind of thing, and there I’ll be opinionated. And I’ll give my explanation without saying this is what you should think of.

But I don't do that in my novels, I think the novels have to be very careful not to be too preachy and not to have too much of a message. The message will come out on its own, I believe, but I definitely try not to be having an axe to grind. Just telling a good story. Standard old fashioned thing, I guess that's, you know what's what makes a good, ultimately what makes a good book worth me reading is you know, right, you're telling a good story.

Mary: I’m usurping everybody's time, I'm sorry.

Sara:That's okay, Mary.

I'll ask another then. As someone who's written so much, are you trying to make each work, do you hope that each work stands on its own, or are you hoping to have some sort of thread that keeps your writing together, like, as a body of work. What's your goal?

Lesley: Probably more like each book. You know, each book is a new thing for me because I write in different genres for different age groups. I think they're quite different. I write quite a few young adult novels, and I'm thrilled that I can still get away with that at my age, and you know I get emails from kids where they come by way of the publisher.

Some of those books are meant for reluctant readers even. So for those reluctant readers, the teacher, sometimes even the teacher will gather up these notes and email them to me. And I can tell the teacher just made the kids write the note to the author.

My favorite note actually came from a kid in California, who said, “Dear Mr Choyce, you really ruined my first day back in school. The teacher made us read your damn poem. And now we sit here and write about this poem and it really wrecked my day.”

Others are a little more positive than that but, you know. So I get a sense with the young adult books that I'm actually connecting with readers, much more than I do with the adult books, because there I don't get much feedback. You know I'll get a few reviews.

The *Broken Man on a Halifax Pier*, actually, right, it was, well 2019 I guess it was, it was before the lockdown. It was my last, maybe my last, maybe my final Canadian author book tour, and I went to the town - it was not to Toronto. It was not to Ottawa, or Montreal or anything like that. it was to a little town in Ontario, not far from Ottawa called Almont, Ontario, a long way from wherever you guys are, I think. But I went there because one bookstore, the previous book of mine that came out before that - commercial break- *Unlikely Redemption of John Alexander McNeil* - on my screen it comes up in reverse, which is really weird.

Sara: No, we can see it clearly.

Lesley: Okay, okay, when I look at my screen over here, it's like a mirror of it. Anyway, that's interesting. So, this book. My final Canadian book tour, I went there because one bookstore in a small little town of Almont Ontario, I think it was about 3000 people, the population, which I think is about the population of your town. They sold 535 copies!

A little tiny book store, Mill Street Bookstore that was run by a person who was, because the booksellers there, loved the book. And so, following this came out *Broken Man on the Halifax Pier* with the book we took the book launch to Almont, Ontario. It was so fascinating because you know, the book had almost no national attention - like wasn’t reviewed in The Globe and Mail, no CBC attention or anything like that but it connected, for some reason it was a town I had never been to in my life. I had no relatives there, there was no reason except for that bookseller that this one book was so popular there. And I think it, you know it generated a fair bit of its own interest in Ontario, probably we're in the small rural towns because of that. That makes me very, very hopeful because you know they're in there’s some kind of connection that happens. And I know Sara that probably didn't even answer your question whatsoever, but there it is.

Sara: That's all right.

Linda: Lesley, I have to ask you about the sense of humor of Charles and his, the way that he

… was that on purpose that you had him, whenever there often could be something serious or at least complicated going on. And then he would have this...He would have this folksy offhand way of saying things that seemed, I'm not gonna say inappropriate, but almost. It was a bit distracting at times because he - because of that. So I guess my question, I'm way too wordy in my questions, I realize I apologize for my first question because I went on and on about it but the second, my question is, was Charles, was that on purpose that you, that he was that character? Was that a character you developed on purpose that way?

Lesley: Yeah, that's a really interesting question. Thanks for asking. Yeah, okay. So think about this, here's my story - and the story came about because I was borrowing this line from the Stan Rogers song *Barrett’s Privateers*, which some of you might be familiar with, very classic bar anthem that people sing down here. And I realized what I've got here is a middle aged white male, who feels sorry for himself. He's lost his money, he's lost his job and all that. How pathetic of a novel could that be. It Could be.

Mary: That’s what I thought when I opened it!

Lesley: Right, so what am I going to do with Charles, I'm going to take that and I'm going to spin it, you know, I, for some reason I was very interested in that. And again, this is not me but you know, the middle aged guy who lost his job. Of course this was in my mind, you know, so many journalists and newspaper people were losing their jobs that you know I could see that, you know, what they would feel like, you know, they had the rug pulled out from under under them, you know, and when they lose their jobs, they lose their identity, all that sort of stuff. So you know I've got this fairly pathetic guy and pathetic situation. And now I've got to put a spin on that to make this fun and interesting, and uplifting for readers so yeah that's where it is, humor, his sarcasm.

You know, as soon as I say this you’ll probably remember this, if you read the book. It comes out best, because of the Ramona character. When the two of them get together - because she's very sharp. She's very witty, she can, you know, when he's got a blast of a line that comes out that sort of, like, puts that spin on the situation. She comes right back with her own angle. So I think, I think that the most fun I had was with the dialogue between those two characters, and of course they're very, very different, they're coming from very different worlds, but they've come together at this particular point in their life. And of course, she's sort of that stranger, you know, my little intro that I read to you, the kindness of strangers. so here's Charles down and out, broken man on a Halifax pier - he's not about to commit suicide or anything like that, by the way, although I suppose it's a little bit, seems like that's hinted at. But here she comes out of the blue, you know, it's not some old friend, it's not some old lover, it's not, you know, anybody from his family, it's this complete stranger. And there's this connection, and I was very very fascinated by that connection between those two people and the way that, the way they both saw life, came out when they get the kind of fiery interchange or the humorous dialogue.

Linda: That was something that you did really well, because I must admit, when I would be listening to some of the things he would say I was almost like cringing on his behalf. And because, as I say it was just, it just - I could picture this man and picture the woman trying to respond to, you know the situation with him, what he had to say and I just felt this, you know that you really did that well. So I'm - and I was reluctant to ask you that question but I am glad I did because that really answers a lot about the dialogue, and so thank you.

Sara: Is there anything that you would change looking back on the novel now that you've had some time to reflect since it came out? And have you re-read it? I'm curious.

Lesley: Well, I actually don't once the book comes out, I pretty much move on and I'm usually working on the next one. And by the time the book gets published I'm usually pretty much tired of it. And that's because of the rewriting. It's like the joy is in that rough draft and then rewrite and rewrite and rewrite and rewrite, and I hire a personal editor and go through and find all of my silly little mistakes or words that I repeat too often, you know, little errors and things like that and then it goes to the publisher, they assign an editor, an editor who goes through all that, proofread it several times and then it finally comes out. Okay, well, I, you know, just kind of the way that it is, you know, as part of that craft that you do has to go through all of those stages, so I don't ever go back and revisit one single thing. You have probably think about, well maybe I could have gone with one of those different endings.

This one I was, I had a hard time trying to figure out how to tie it together without it being too pretty, at the end. It still needed to be believable and realistic. For me, you know, part of that comes back to Nova Scotia, and what I view as kind of Nova Scotian sensibility, self reliance, sense of humor. I mean, maybe even this comes back to, you know, the thing about Charles and the way that he sees the world. So, you know, I moved here as an outsider, in 1978, comin up, immigrating from New Jersey, and some of the things that I noticed about Nova Scotia down the eastern shore of course, is that there's great understatement, you know, I bet you find this in your part of the world too. A hurricane would come through here, and it would be typical for a fisherman to say, “We had a little blow last night. Yeah, yeah, got a little windy.” That's pretty much the way that they would say it. You know what I mean is, his boat would’ve washed out 20 miles down the coast or something like that.

People sort of take hard times and they put a fairly positive spin on things, they find it, you know, a humorous element to it. And I, you know, tried to build that into my stories I think because those attitudes fascinate me, and I was still kind of clinging on to, you know some of the older ways that are here, you know. We're being pushed into the rest of the 21st century, like, you know so many rural places.

Now, you might use Halifax here, we’re going through this phase where prices of houses and properties were doubling every year, because so many people want to move to Nova Scotia. It's just insane. I’m a little bit worried that we're going to lose more of our old culture and traditional culture that's here. But I think I tried to build some of that spirit into some of my stories. And so no I, you know, I don't revisit the stories once they're there, they're there, and I move on to the next book. And I tend not for the most part to revisit characters or anything like that, although I think you know I’m about to break that rule with one of my books, not this one but another one.

Sara:Is there anything that you want to write someday that you haven't tried yet for some reason?

Lesley: Oh sure, I'm not sure I'm not sure I can give you an answer as to what it is . But I do like doing very, very different projects if I can get my head around them, and I have been doing a fair bit of travel writing lately, except I haven't been traveling lately, but for a magazine called Celtic Life International. So I've been able to, you know, my wife and I are traveling, to mostly European things, mostly Celtic places, Ireland and Scotland and Cornwall, Normandy - not Normandy, what’s the other one - Brittany and France, and those kind of things, because I can then kind of write some articles. But I don't write traditional travel articles I've got - I look for the nooks and crannies, and not the big tourist destinations but the little in between things that happen on your way to the Eiffel Tower or wherever it happens to be. So, you know, I'd like to do, you know, a fair bit more of that. I've got a manuscript that's trying to find a home called Around England with a Dog - and my dog’s not here. He's in the rest of the house, he usually sleeps up here.

And it was just about my wife and I, traveling around the world with our West Highland White Terrier, and the interesting experiences that happened. So I’d like to get more into that travel adventure kind of literature I suppose. If I'm given the opportunity, but we're kind of stalled here now. Like you, we’re all staying in our communities, I guess, staying mostly at home.

Mary: Like everybody else.

Lesley: Yeah.

Linda: Lesley, Callander, isn't that far from Almont, really. It's kind of - it's in northern Ontario and sort of between, you know, between Thunder Bay and, you know, Ottawa. So we, our little library is trying to raise enough money to build a new library, so we have author talks, and so if we sell 500 books you'll come to a Callander, will you, and maybe do an author talk, will you?

Lesley: Absolutely, yes.

Linda: Okay, well, we better get on that Sara. That would be lovely to meet you in person and your dog and your wife, and it is a beautiful part of the country if you, you know, if you have any desire to travel here.

Lesley: How far are you from Sudbury?

Linda: Only about an hour, hour and a half maybe from Sudbury.

Lesley: Yeah. Okay, so I've been to Sudbury - it's been quite a few years now. But so, Canadian Children's Book Week. I think twice they sent me to Sudbury, so I visited schools, it was mostly visiting schools in town there and a few rural communities that were around there, Copper Cliffs, I think was one of them, in a couple of months.

I went from there to North Bay on a little airplane and I think it was the middle of a snowstorm, it was a classic Canadian author tour. I think it was November, it wasn't even the middle of the winter.

Linda: So Callander is near North Bay, we're only about ten minutes from North Bay. And yes, we can have snowstorms in November, because I retired here to be near my daughter and I was from Southern Ontario and yes it is. We can have those sorts of things. But we would invite you in the summertime, and it’s beautiful here. So, yeah, so we'll have to get selling books, that's what we'll have to do.

Lesley: Yes, please do.

Sara: It's funny, in terms of environment, we're probably very similar to where you are and what you write about, because we're a very small town, rural, lots and lots of water around us, we have some of the same weird, wacky weather as Nova Scotia. My husband's actually from Nova Scotia and he's like, yeah there's, like, basically no difference, like we’ll look at the weather where his parents are and it's like, oh yeah it's one degree colder than here, like, but it's like exactly the same so you'd be very comfortable.

Lesley: Okay,

Arlene: One thing we don't have is tides.

Lesley: And surfing action. So that's what ultimately brought me to Nova Scotia was surfing. If you go back to the marine biology I still have the love of the ocean, and I've been surfing since I was 13 I think, and the waves are really good here. So.

Sara: Not somewhere warmer, hey, you still settled in somewhere that gets pretty intense winters?

Lesley: Yep, and, well I surf through the year and surf in the winter, it's actually winter surfing it's actually fairly popular now - it's crowded, where once upon a time we would just be myself or two or three friends, that sort of thing, in January, now there’d be a couple of dozen people every day.

Sara: Wow.

Lesley: This one came out after, I’ll do the commercial thing, this came out after *Broken Man on a Halifax Pier*, *Saltwater Chronicles: Notes on Everything Under the Nova Scotia Sun*. So this is kind of a collection of essays that incorporates just lots of things, nonfiction sort of autobiographical, about the ocean, about the death of my father, about the subconscious mind, about rescuing animals here, we've got lots of wildlife rescue places down the road from here and just all sorts of personal kinds of stuff. So again it makes me think that I'm a very lucky person. I get to write many different kinds of books, it makes me a little bit worried that, you know, writers like me are gonna have a harder time getting published in the near future. And, you know, I'm gonna have to work at that, that's all I can say to make sure that I’m allowed to keep doing it, as I keep getting older and older.

Sara: So as you write with, in so many different, like, styles and genres and even age groups like that - is there one type of writing that you find easier or perhaps more fun for you?

Lesley: The young adult novels, generally are fun to write.But I think my, you know, my main sort of meat and potatoes would be able to write novels, much like *Broken Man on the Halifax Pier*, if they, if I had better luck and be able to find publishers to publish them, I’d certainly be publishing more of those kinds of novels but it's very difficult to find a publisher, with them. So, kind of, with the YA they sell 1000s of copies so, tend to be more popular. It allows me to be a 16 year old kid again.

Sara: Well as a library person, I have one question I definitely have to ask and, is there a book that you've read recently that you think everybody should read, or that you would really highly recommend to us?

Lesley: Oh wait, that's ... what have I been reading … reading’s been very helpful. I've been reading a lot of books actually because it's been really helpful - during a pandemic, you want a whole lot of books at your access. And so I’ve been reading lots of them. I’m going to turn around, back here for just a second...

You know, there's an author whose last name is Troost, T-R-O-O-S-T, whose first name is Martin, M-A--A-R-T-I-N, who writes these wildly funny and crazy travel books mostly about the south, very remote islands in the South Pacific. So you might want to look him up. If you're brave enough, read one of his books. I won't mention any specific title. When you look at the titles you'll see why I don’t mention the titles. They've got really wild titles that are a little bit misleading, so check them out and see what you come up with.

Sara: Awesome. Thank you. I always like to see what writers are interested in reading, because your brains, I'm sure, work differently than ours when you're reading a book.

Lesley: Ah well, one of my favorite writers who does that travel type book is Bill Bryson, who you probably are familiar with, right, he writes a lot of books about England and stuff like that.

I put him on my list of people I wanted to interview when we went to England for *Around England with a Dog* book. And he shot me right down, no interview, I don't do interviews. Don't talk to me. I don't wanna hear anything about your book.

I'm still a big fan of his, but you know I was a little bit shocked that, you know, writers can have, of course, the full range of personalities. They can be warm and friendly or they canbe: I don't want to talk, too tired, talking about my books. He’s still a good writer. It's very, very funny, at least.

Sara: Mary, you're on mute.

Mary: My phone rang and I turned me off. I'm interested in the young adult books that you write. In that, what age group and how do you go about - I'll tell you, my cousin, wrote three books with the idea that they would be for young adults. I think they're probably geared to probably 13 to 15 year olds and it had to do with the fall of Troy. And he did well, he managed to get them published and I don't know how he did that but it's sort of, you know - how do you pick a subject?

Lesley: Yeah, for me it's… I’ll write something that's contemporary. All my YA books are contemporary, which means that it's got to be about either the here and now or in the near future, not about when I was a kid, so nothing nostalgic. I'm not smart enough really to do historical novels. I'd rather be kind of in my imagination than doing research.

But there’s one, Orca is the publisher from British Columbia, and they do amazing things with their market, because they want to sell international rights, so you know these books like these will appear in Swedish, Slovenian, German. It’s really kinda cool when it happens.

This would have been an issue-oriented book. They’re not all issue-oriented, but the rules have changed, and it has to do - my characters tend to be 16 year old boys more than girls just because that’s what a writer does, stick to my own gender, for the most part, although I break that rule as often as I can. But, so this had to do with examining some of the stuff that was happening in the United States with immigrants, with the move toward much more rich conservative kind of world, so I took it right down to education. But it's set in the near future, where a kid goes off sailing to the South Pacific with his idealistic parents, is away for two years and he comes back and at the school, the rules have changed, and it's basically militant brainwashing, that's happening to kids, so he gets involved with the underground that’s there. And that's pretty much, you know, the idea that I had to get the story going, and then just trying to tell a good story beyond that with it without trying to be too preachy or anything.

So, I'll look around and you know like, I've sort of run out of things that are close to home for me you know I've written novels that have to do with skateboarding and surfing and, you know, playing in rock bands and things like that but, you know, beyond that had to move into other territory so sometimes I will do research, you know, I'll do a new thing that involves learning about sailing or learning about dirt bikes or whatever it happens to be in that I'll use that as a key element in the story, but you know beyond having some of those tricks in there, it's really just about trying to get into the life of that character.

So as far as I can tell, with those YA novels, young adult novels, the main characters tend to be 16, the readers tend to be, I think you pretty much nailed it down, somewhere between 12 and 16, so they're coming up to that age, they want to be reading about somebody who's slightly older but not too old. And a lot of YA books are getting written, that are published and adults are reading them, I think this is what I read in the New York Times. You know, YA fiction is very very popular with a lot of adults these days, and you've seen a lot of movies being made from young adult novels and maybe that helps as well. But it's a very, it's been a very, very vibrant field in writing and publishing now for almost 20 years. I keep thinking, “Well, I've had such a good run and I keep thinking it's going to end.” Either somebody is going to tell me I'm too old to be writing YA novels. I should know better, or, I can't possibly relate to kids that age or that the popularity of that novel form is going to die out. The strange thing is it hasn't, you know, despite, you know, despite internet and video games and everything else, YA novels are very, very strong.

Mary: That's great. Because kids are reading YA books then they will move on to, hopefully, adult novels and keep on reading.

Lesley: Absolutely.

Sara: Do you think if you tried to write a YA book, hoping that adults would read it, do you think you would change the way you wrote it?

Lesley: I think, you know, that the style of Broken Man on a Halifax Pier is easily adaptable to the style that I write some of my YA books in, not all of them but some of them. I've got one YA book that's sort of circulating, looking for a home. It didn't fit into the mold of the publishers that I know.

It's called, lets see if I can remember the name- *In The Kingdom of Cheese, There Are No Heroes*. It's about a young 16 year old boy who's quite overweight. I've never been an overweight 16 year old boy before. But he has, you know the similarity there is that he's got a really strong spirit and a sense of humor that allows him to rise above, you know, the kids give them a hard time where they put the labels on them or they post funny pictures about him or whatever, he's got this spirit allows him to rise above that, It was really fun to write. Mostly because I could find the voice of that character. And he’s really off the wall , most of my teenage characters are fairly smart, they're highly individualistic. You know all the female characters that have always appeared in those books are very intentionally, they're usually smarter than the boys. This is the way that it usually goes in real life, and they tend to be also very independent thinkers and quite feisty. So, you know that for me helps me write a YA novel.

Sara: Lynn I'm seeing you're just joining us in here. Hi, welcome. Did you have any questions that you wanted to ask of Lesley?

Lynn: No, I just got the book and I just read the first three or four chapters, and I'm hooked on it but garden has been calling.

Sara: It's a beautiful day for it.

Linda: I just have one last question, Lesley, how many of your books are written with, you know, the setting being in the East Coast, do you have lots of them?

Lesley: Yes. Yeah, probably at least half of them. The young adult novels tend to be a little more generic. I don't do that on purpose but I learned to do that along the way. Americans don't really want to read, I've been told this anyways, put it in quotes, “Americans don't want to read about rural Canadian settings”. Yeah, but, so the YA novels, because they get marketed so much in the States, they tend to be generic and sort of, you couldn't tell if it was Canada or the United States, could be coastal somewhere, small town coastal but it looks good ambiguous, but I never do that with any of my adult writing or with poetry things it's very highly specific and very very much charged with Nova Scotia there so, Nova Scotia is my muse.

Lynn: Is that where you're from?

Lesley: I'm from New Jersey originally.

Mary: It’s still coastal though, isn't it.

Lesley: Yeah, and that's where I learned to surf, of course, New Jersey, but you know, very very different, and I moved up here without a job or anything. I just moved here because this is where I wanted to move to.

Mary: Well, you did well.

Lesley: Well, I’ve had a good run at it so far, but I’m more interested in where I go from here, rather than where, I don't know.

Mary: That's fair. Yeah. Most of us are just trying to get on the other side of this damn COVID problem and figure out what we can do with our lives and we can go out the door without worrying about it, which is difficult.

Lesley: It's taken a while for the vaccines to kick in for us to get past them so ….we'll get there.

Lynn: Do you have plans for a new book?

Lesley: I always have some things on the go. One of my rules is to not talk too much about books that I’m working on.

Lynn: Well, in case you don’t finish it.

Lesley: Well, I start to lose interest in them if I start talking about them, it's got to stay in my head, until I get it done.

Mary: Well that’s fair. I really appreciate you taking the time with us. Really,

Sara: Yes, thank you so much for joining us. I know we all really appreciate the opportunity to be able to pick your brain a little bit, especially after reading your book and being able to sort of attach the brain to the work, if that makes sense. We definitely really appreciate you joining us for this.

Lesley: Right, and I enjoyed sharing my time with you so I wish you well, there in Callander. You’re named after a town in Scotland I bet, right?

Sara: That's right. You'd be surprised how often the two Google searches get mixed up too, because as far as I can tell they're the only two Callanders. So it just sort of keeps going back and forth.

Mary:Yep.

Linda: Thank you, Lesley.

Lesley: Well, I'll say goodbye. Take care. Thanks.

Sara: Thank you and thank you everyone for coming by.

This has been the first author chat of the Evergreen nominated award authors with the Callander Public Library. If you would like to join in on the next one, be sure to contact the Callander Public Library and we will be happy to make sure you don't miss the next one.

If you would like to make sure that you can listen to the future of these podcasts, be sure to follow this channel so that you can see all of the upcoming authors. Our next author will be Sarah Kurchak, author of *I Overcame My Autism And All I Got Was This Lousy Anxiety Disorder*. If you'd like to participate, be sure to let us know. Otherwise it will be posted a week after the event, and you can listen to it here.