

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

You don't know what an honour and privilege it is to be here. I have met so many amazing writers tonight whom I have admired for years. I am just a reporter.

I feel humbled when I think of the contributions and sacrifices made to journalists under much greater threat than myself such as Anna Politkovskaya and Veronica Guerin – who was also gunned down for her work.

And of course I cannot forget Tara Singh Hayer, an Indo-Canadian publisher who I knew very well. He was shot and paralyzed in 1988 and then murdered on Nov. 18, 1998 for writing about some of his community's darkest secrets – especially the Air India bombing.

We are approaching the eighth anniversary of Tara's death – the only known assassination of a journalist in Canada – and the case remains unsolved. People who know what happened are either too fearful or too cowardly to come forward to authorities or even to reporters.

I want to thank Pen Canada and in particular Judy Creighton, a fighting journalist in her own right. Paul Kidd was a much-admired foreign correspondent when I was just a rookie. He travelled the world to bring Canada difficult and important stories. And he inspired those of us just starting out.

We all want to be foreign correspondents when we start in this business – even if our first jobs are at small weekly or community newspapers. I certainly did.

But I soon realized that there were all kinds of worlds within Canada that were not being covered, that deserved to be covered, that needed to be covered.

This award is important to me, not because I view myself as courageous – stubborn and obsessive are better words that come to mind – but it is important because it gives me the power to write more of the stories I am passionate about.

There is Air India – the biggest mass murder in Canadian history and still no justice. It is a story that I believe has been under-covered by

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the Canadian media. There is Tara Hayer's unsolved murder. And there are many other instances in Canada today where people are not able to speak freely for fear of violent retribution by a minority within their community.

It is not always easy to stay on a story for a long time. The news cycle in Canadian media outlets is short. Memories fade too quickly. Stories that are hard to do are easy to ignore.

I appreciate the support I have gotten over the years from my co-workers and from the editors of my paper – particularly Patricia Graham, who is now *The Vancouver Sun's* Editor-in-Chief.

And I really appreciate the support of McClelland and Stewart and my editors Dinah Forbes and Susan Renouf who have stood by with through the rather gruelling process of writing my book about Air India, *Loss of Faith*, in just 100 days.

But I want to thank more than anyone the sources who have risked everything by confiding in me over the years - some have been beaten, others threatened, some have fled into witness protection, two have been killed (and this has all happened here in Canada.)

And yet others still come forward to talk to me, to entrust me with information I need to draw attention to what is going on. I want to promise them tonight that I will do everything I can to keep telling their stories.

Thank you.

Kim Bolan
20 October 2006
Toronto, Canada