

# DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS

## Novelist Extraordinaire

by Guylaine Williams

Many students attending U.N.B. and St. Thomas who are natives of New Brunswick are striving to achieve certain high goals.

Many will succeed, and a few will become well known, and maybe even famous in their particular field.

A great example of a well known native of New Brunswick who has become not only widely read but immensely admired by people of all ages is David Adams Richards.

Richards is famous for his novels, *The Coming of Winter* (1974), which was awarded the Norma Epstein Prize, and also appeared in translation in Russia, *Blood Ties* (1976), *Lives of Short Duration* (1981), *Road to the Stilt House* (1985), and *Nights Below Station Street* which was awarded the 1988 Governor General's Award for fiction.

David Richards was born in 1950 on the Miramichi and spent the first 19 years of his life in Newcastle. He attended Harkins Academy and graduated in 1969 after which he left to go on to St. Thomas University, where he spent three years.

where he visited England and other countries and learned first hand of their different cultures and their own distinct beauty.

In 1983 Richards came back to Fredericton and spent four years as a Writer-in-Residence at the University of New Brunswick, and in 1986 he was named one of Canada's Ten Best Fiction Writers, in the "45 Below" competition it is believed by many that Richards entirely writes about the Miramichi and its poverty and what is associated with it, but this is not so.

Richards writes about his own "fictional river" where he, at times, adds his own streets, poverty is not his main concern; and in his novels poverty is never stressed. What he does try to get across is internal growth and that cohesive violence is sometimes more damaging than physical violence. His novels are uplifting. In his latest novel: *Nights Below Station Street*, Adele Walsh, daughter of an alcoholic Joe Walsh, has an

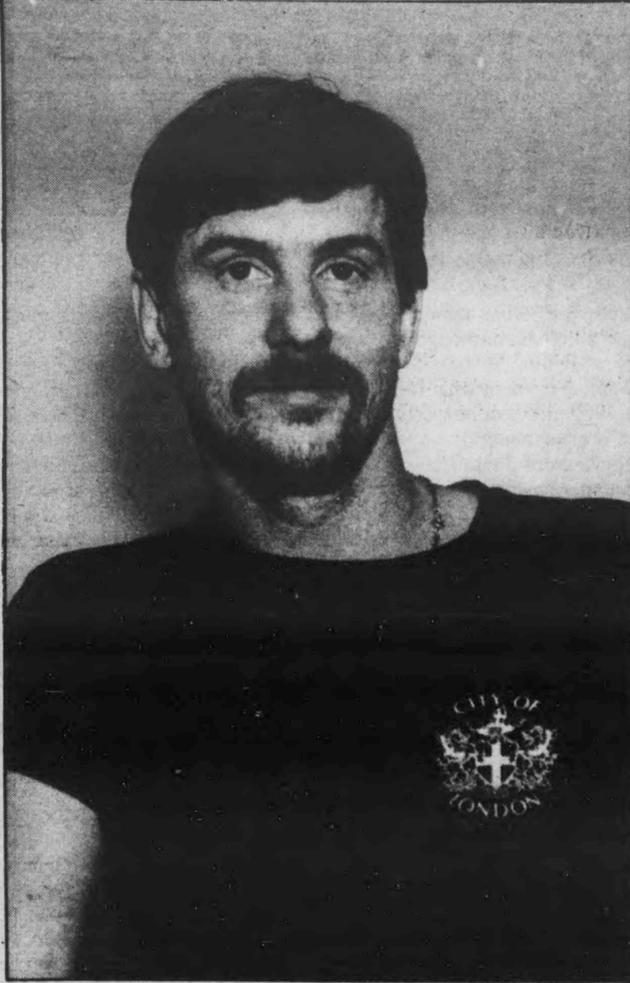


Photo by Jean-Louis Tremblay

David Adams Richards

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would like to try again. The way he feels today about things is basically the way he's felt since

*"It's the people you love that you can write about... you have to breath life into them, and the only way you can do that is if you have empathy for them..."*

David Adams Richards treats his writing as a vocation, and he believes that a lot of criticism about his work is wrong... "it's missed the mark". He thinks that with criticism, writers who aren't fashionable, suffer. He believes that it is only what the writer thinks of his/her own work that really counts.

Before novels, David wrote poetry and this is something he

age 19. He says... "by the time I was 19 I had the philosophy that is now the core of what I have today." Richards also believes that in the past he has worked better alone. "I realized through trial and error and bumps and rocks in life that I work better alone... I feel more comfortable alone."

His thoughts on role models are a part of this philosophy: "To

*"It's a rough and ready place, and there's a more traditional idea of what boys and girls do on the Miramichi".*

On the Miramichi David was like any other average kid who liked to hunt and fly fish, drive around town on a Friday night checking out the action and just basically "hang out".

Richard believes that on the Miramichi you grow up a lot faster than many other places as, he says, "it's a rough and ready place, and there's a more traditional idea of what boys and girls do on the Miramichi".

While attending St. Thomas Richards had the great privilege of meeting Richard Kennedy who has been an English Professor there for a number of years. Richards says, "he was a great inspiration for me..." After three years of loving Shakespeare and studying the English language David went to Europe

overwhelming, yet hidden (in some respects) amount of love for her father. Despite this, she abuses him a lot throughout the novel. Yet, at the story's end, it is truly uplifting when it is made clear the depth of their feelings for each other. And here is where we see them growing internally and this is Richards goal in all his novels.

He has the ability to bring his characters forth to the reader in the most touching and deepest ways. He writes like it's his second life. Vivid and so real, like all great novels in the past. The reality of it all, just like being there and feeling what they're feeling. And talking about his character Richards says this... "It's the people you love that you can write about... you

*"For Adele who had always loved hockey, and especially the Montreal Canadians, this 1972 series between the Canadians and the Russians, was the one spiritual happening she could think of. It might have seemed silly to a few, but the greater majority of Canadians thought like she did. And she felt betrayed by anyone who happened to downplay the event in any way. Especially when those who didn't know what it signified downplayed it to show their level of expertise and fair play." From Nights Below Station Street.*

be a role model it's not what you do but how you do it... it's how you live that makes you a role model."

He says... "what matters most is your instinct for life". Richards has just finished another novel. It is the second in the three-novel series which began with *Nights Below Station Street*. The novel is as yet unnamed and is in the hands of the publisher McLellan and Stewart scheduled for release next September.

Richards is working on the third novel in this series, his sixth novel and seventh major work.

Richards stated in a recent Newcastle article: "...I feel I have matured as a writer in my own style of writing. I am now more objective in the reaction of my characters and more removed from them emotionally."

There are plans to make a movie based on Richards' book, *Nights Below Station Street*. The book looks at life on the Miramichi.

"Shooting is tentatively scheduled for February-March, 1990", Richards said. "I would like it to be shot on the Miramichi," he says. He feels that the book would be portrayed better there.

Richards now lives in Saint John with his wife Peggy and his fluffy cat Theo. He says... "it is just a bigger version of the Miramichi and I feel at home here".

In January, he will be doing a western tour beginning in British Columbia and then he'll move onto Regina in March as well as Edmonton University, Alberta in the fall of 1990, where he will spend the year as Writer-in-Residence.

But wherever he goes he says "I will always have one foot on the Miramichi as it is there he still considers his best friends to be."

David Adams Richards has the ability to capture the little things that hit the hardest, and to show the naturalness of his characters. He has a very "human touch".

David Adams Richards is a real person, and this is obvious, whether it's when he's chewing his tobacco or writing intensely of his characters. Whatever the situation, it is clear to see that like the town from which he comes, full of all its' color and glory, and "war & peace" he's a writer with as much grace and style.

