

Prairie living inspires former Swift author

BY GAIL JANSEN
SWIFT CURRENT

Lee Gowan didn't know he wanted to be a writer until his mother pointed him in the right direction.

Now it's who he is.

Unlike other writers' biographies, Gowan didn't spend his formative years thinking up stories and jotting them down, or aching to get his words from thought to paper.

He didn't take any particular enjoyment in completing his English assignments, though he wrote them well and showed a talent for writing. As he grew up in Swift Current, he never thought of making a living as a writer. He had never met any and as he puts it, "it just never occurred to me."

After graduation from high school however, his mother looked to him to help her with the creation of a local history and encouraged him to take a writing workshop so he would have the skills she needed.

Feeling a little rebellious, as many 19-year-olds do, Gowan balked at the suggestion by taking poetry and fiction writing workshops instead of the non-fiction workshop his mother had intended. Now nearly 29 years later, it's one rebellious act that has shaped both his life and his career.

The author of three novels of fiction, a compilation of short stories, and a screenplay, Gowan has been writing non-stop ever since. When not working on one of his own projects, he helps others as a Creative Writing Instructor for the Continuing Studies Department at the University of Toronto.

While he no longer resides in the western provinces, he has never fully left the prairies behind him as evidenced in all three of his novels, set with the prairies as his inevitable backdrop.

"It's one of those things that you don't really have any control of," says Gowan during

his recent stop home where he was promoting his latest book *Confession*.

"Growing up on a farm, during those formative years, has shaped me and imprinted on my subconscious."

"I've spent 28 of my 47 years in Swift Current. It's an effect I couldn't shake even if I wanted to."

While Gowan doesn't discount the idea of writing his next novel in a more urban setting, more than likely he says, it will probably end up being set in the prairies, as that seems to be the niche on which he keeps focusing.

"I seem to write about the Prairies in a way that people haven't really seen before," says Gowan,

whose novels though widely different in plot and genre, all have a dark comic stream within them.

It is a dark stream which has elicited the comment from one reviewer that his latest novel *Confession* can be deemed a "Prairie Gothic" novel, though jokes

Gowan, "it doesn't have a single vampire in it."

"My fans, both from here and elsewhere in Canada seem to appreciate that unity of the prairie setting in my books. It seems to bring them to a place they'd like to go."

For Gowan, the near future could hold any number of settings, plots and possibilities — it's one of the things he loves the most about writing.

"It's the discovery of where the characters want to take you, the way they end up surprising you and the excitement that comes with that discovery. I'm interested in looking at different kinds of stories, and never want to feel that I'm being boxed in.

"If people had an expectation that I would only ever write in one genre, or in one setting then maybe I would be bored, but I'm always looking to set up new challenges for myself, and can't ever see me being bored with it."

With the seeds of a new novel germinating in his head, a screenplay in the works with his 21-year-old son, and a challenge thrown to him to write an original play for the Lyric Theatre, on top of his current touring and book promotion schedule and his University teaching schedule, boredom isn't something Gowan will be experiencing anytime soon.

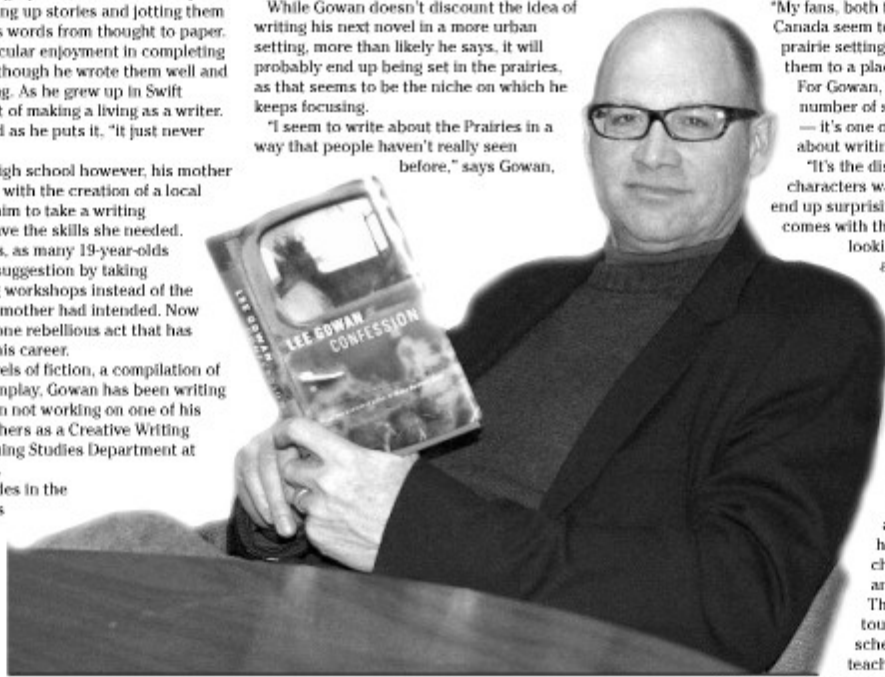


Photo by Gail Jansen

Author Lee Gowan was in Swift Current recently reading from his latest novel, *Confession*.

