

Q&A with Matthew Kirby

Author of *Going, Going, Gone*

Winner: Gold Award: Best Article Manitoba 2014

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TMS: *How did you get the idea for this story?*

MK: The last thing in my mind was to sell it for financial remuneration (laughs). I wrote this for my son, William. Within the context of this piece, it was to honour them – William's grandparents – and to give William a sense of his father from a different perspective. I'm the son of an army officer, so we moved every one to three years throughout my upbringing. It was my wife, the farm girl, who suggested pitching it because it was a very interesting social history.

TMS: *So you never intended it for a wider audience?*

MK: I wrote nine stories when I wrote that story; nine stories when I finally had some time. I wrote them all for William, I didn't try to have them published, but that's how it came about. It did pique my interest in writing for an audience beyond my son, beyond my immediate family. The award was simply... (laughs) a treat. Utterly unexpected and when I first got the email from Nelle (Oosterom, Senior Editor at *Canada's History*) that I was nominated, I thought it was great.

TMS: *The story obviously resonated with a large audience. But what does your original audience, your 18-year-old son, think of it?*

MK: I think he did appreciate that and he appreciated the feeling of it. He appreciates the fact that he does have that story. He was also impressed because he said, "You must be pleased, Dad", when Mark Reid (Editor-in-Chief of *Canada's History*) said he wanted to publish it. I think he is of few words with these sort of things.

TMS: *There's a beauty in the story, but also a certain sadness. How did you capture both of those in the story?*

MK: It was a sweet sadness. It wasn't that my parents-in-law were weeping at the end. They were content. It was the children; we were the ones who were most sad. They lived the way of life – I didn't live that. I was privileged to be part of that way of life in the twilight, if you like, because it has changed dramatically and continues to change. There are managers and there are owners of farms now, but they're usually in cities. The farms are

consolidating so much more, buying more and more land. These are big conglomerates that own the farms. But that single family farm is disappearing.

TMS: *What advice would you have for other writers?*

MK: If you want to get your soul into writing, don't come at it from the perspective of "Can I flog this, can I sell this?" It has to be interesting in its own right. Why did I (write) this? Because it was interesting. My parents-in-law would be the last people on earth to say they led this fascinating, interesting life. And so it was a delight to show the beauty and artistry of being a farming family and I think that's so important when you're writing – that you see and you feel the beauty of the situation. Whatever the story is, you have to feel it and know that it's a story worth telling, and that it touched your soul – I think that's so important.

Erin Isings conducted this interview for TMS.