

A royal destiny in Ghana

Washington secretary also heads a village in her native Ghana

KING PEGGY
AN AMERICAN SECRETARY, HER ROYAL DESTINY, AND THE INSPIRING STORY OF HOW SHE CHANGED AN AFRICAN VILLAGE
by Peggielene Bartels and Eleanor Herman
(Doubleday, 335 pages, \$30 hardcover)

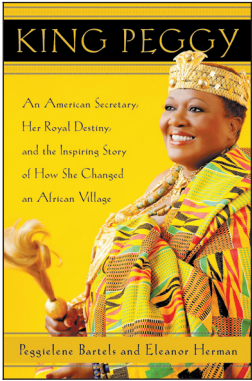
Betty Kowall

As U.S. author Eleanor Herman explains, she was attending a Washington reception in 2009 at the embassy of Ghana when she began to play an old game — one she would sometimes indulge in when she didn’t know anyone at a gathering of people.

She studied the people in the room carefully, then chose someone who looked interesting and went up to introduce herself and initiate a conversation.

On this occasion, the person Herman approached was a beautiful woman dressed in African regalia who was standing by herself at one side of the room.

Her name was Peggielene Bartels and she



explained to Herman that she was a secretary employed at the embassy.

When Herman asked if she could get her some food or wine, Bartels declined and then explained that she had recently been named a king (chief) in Africa and was not allowed to be seen eating or drinking in public.

Herman, a writer who calls herself a “Sherlock Holmes of history,” was immediately captivated and so began the relationship she formed with Bartels. It resulted in this book, an account of “King Peggy” and her first two years as chief of Otuam, a village of 7,000 in Ghana.

Bartel’s journey to the throne involved incidents and discoveries that were both

fascinating and often humorous. It was also at times very frustrating and expensive. She continued to support herself on a secretary’s salary, but now had to pay for many additional expenses from her own pocket.

Bartels quickly found out that the elders of Otuam had been stealing the community’s funds for many years and that it was bankrupt. The palace was in ruins, there was no fresh water, no high school and no money to bury the former king, her uncle — something that had to be done before she could ascend to the throne.

The above were only the tip of the iceberg concerning the corruption and other problems she uncovered and had to begin dealing with. She still works in Washington, but now visits Ghana for a few weeks annually.

This is the true story of a remarkable woman who is determined to make a better life for her people. The respect that Bartels earned by using her energy, wisdom and sense of humour to begin achieving her goals is both amazing and inspiring.

Herman’s previous books include *Mistress of the Vatican* — *The True Story of Olimpia Maidalchini: The Secret Female Pope* (2008), *Sex With the Queen* (2006) and *Sex With Kings* (2005).

Betty Kowall is a Guelph writer.



WHAT THEY’RE READING



Roman Dubinski is a retired University of Waterloo professor of English and now a regular lecturer for the Laurier Association for Lifelong Learning. He recently read:

THE MARRIAGE PLOT
by Jeffrey Eugenides (Knopf Canada, 416 pages, \$32 hardcover)

“My son, David, sent me this novel recently because he thought I’d enjoy reading about an English major, Madeleine Hanna, who is interested in the marriage plots of writers like Jane Austen, but who has to face the challenge of the emerging post-modern critical theory of the early 1980s. Author Jeffrey Eugenides certainly makes fun of some of the absurdities and excesses of this new critical theory. But the major part of the novel focuses on Madeleine’s complicated and sometimes tragic love life and her struggle to find her own identity. Her academic interests are paralleled by her own complex marriage plot.

“Eugenides is a compelling and sophisticated story teller and always keeps the reader engrossed in the vagaries of Madeleine’s life. Besides, his prose often rises to poetic intensity and is a joy to read.

“After finishing the novel, I phoned David and told him that his intuition was correct, for I truly enjoyed the novel.”

• Roman Dubinski will give a noon-hour talk on **Wednesday, March 28** as part of the Kitchener Public Library’s **Ideas & Issues** lecture series at the Forest Heights branch on Fischer-Hallman Road. His topic will be: **Slavery in Jane Austen’s Novels.**

Bestsellers

Based on sales reported by more than 280 independent Canadian booksellers for the week ending March 10. Bracketed figures indicate number of weeks on list.

- Hardcover fiction**
- (14) **Death Comes to Pemberley** P.D. James
 - (9) **Believing the Lie** Elizabeth George
 - (35) **A Dance with Dragons** George R.R. Martin
 - (2) **Lone Wolf** - Jodi Picoult
 - (28) **The Cat’s Table** Michael Ondaatje
 - (3) **The House I Loved** Tatiana De Rosnay
 - (26) **The Night Circus** Erin Morgenstern
 - (27) **The Sense of an Ending** Julian Barnes
 - (3) **I’ve Got Your Number** Sophie Kinsella
 - (20) **The Virgin Cure** Ami McKay

- Hardcover non-fiction**
- (15) **Eating Dirt** - Charlotte Gill
 - (40) **Go the F**K to Sleep** Adam Mansbach/Ricardo Cortes
 - (20) **Steve Jobs** - Walter Isaacson
 - (22) **Into the Silence** - Wade Davis
 - (2) **The World of Downton Abbey** Jessica Fellowes
 - (2) **Sacred Headwaters** Wade Davis
 - (1) **A Universe from Nothing** Lawrence M. Krauss
 - (19) **Arguably** Christopher Hitchens
 - (15) **The Chuck Davis History of Metropolitan Vancouver** Chuck Davis
 - (1) **Behind the Beautiful Forevers** - Katherine Boo

@TBM Bookmanager

CHILDREN

Journal entries describe 12-year-old’s challenges in 1927 logging community

A FOREST OF GOLD
by Courtney Maika (Scholastic, 176 pages, \$7.99 softcover)

Cindy Matthews

Through daily journal entries, this book’s 12-year-old heroine Emily Patterson writes about her life with her family in the town of Mattawa, Ont. in the year 1927.

Early in the book, her father leaves to work in a logging camp so that he can provide for the family.

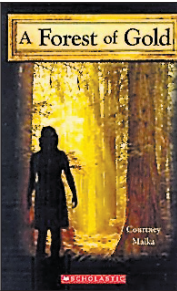
“Pa told us at supper today that he will be leaving for a lumber camp in Temiscaming in a week,” Emily writes in her journal. “We all got quiet for a little bit. No one likes to see him go, but we all know that it’s part of his work, since you can’t farm in the winter.”

When her brother Joe insists he will join his father in the logging camp, an argument blows up and Joe swears at his father.

Angry determination prompts Joe to sneak off to work at another logging camp. Emily then finds herself caught up in the deception of keeping Joe’s new life a secret. When her parents learn the truth, she experiences their wrath.

Many of the male figures in Emily’s life carry great significance — there’s a boy who gets very ill with the flu, her father, who she misses terribly, and her older brother, who she admires but sometimes misunderstands.

The author, Courtney Maika, is a young Pembroke, Ont., writer



who was just 17 when she wrote this book while on a Christmas break from school. It was inspired in part by books she had read in Scholastic’s *Dear Canada* series for young people, describing different events and times in Canadian history.

Maika sustains the voice of a 12-year-old journal writer well and does an excellent job of seamlessly injecting information and historical notes into the journal.

In an email exchange with this reviewer, she explained that she chose Mattawa for her story because she knew it well from visits to her own grandparents’ home there. Rewriting and editing the book was completed during time off from her university studies.

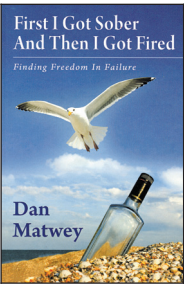
An avid reader, Maika believes her interest in writing evolved out of her love for reading. She has kept a journal herself since she was 11 and says the *Dear Canada* series helped to inspire the format of her book.

A Forest of Gold is suitable for readers 9 to 12. I look forward to more works by this gifted talent.

Cindy Matthews is a Wilmet Township writer.

LOCAL BOOKS

FIRST I GOT SOBER AND THEN I GOT FIRED: FINDING FREEDOM IN FAILURE
by Dan Matwey (Self-published, 163 pages, \$14.99 softcover)



This is not a beautifully written book — but it would be too easy, and a mistake, to dismiss it for that reason.

Dan Matwey has a story to tell and is brave enough to tell it. It’s a tale that will be of interest to anyone who has struggled with alcohol’s grip or who has struggled to find a meaningful career or purpose in life.

Not so long ago the Guelph resident had a secure job as a production planner with a manufacturing concern. He was married and the father of three young children.

But he was also a drinker, he says, someone who daily was sneaking off to get a buzz from booze, sometimes in bars but just as often on a remote rural road, alone with a bottle. Soon enough, his marriage failed.

How badly was he hooked? Bad enough that even before his first child was born he bought a particular station wagon to serve as the family car because the last row of seats faced backwards.

It was purchased “for the simple reason that my kids wouldn’t be able to see me drink while I drove,” he writes.

Thanks in part to the help he received at the Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Matwey stopped drinking, earned an MBA, remarried, rekindled his religious faith

and started a new career in financial planning.

But while he’d been able to hold a job as a drinker, it wasn’t so easy now that he was sober. Ironically, his priorities had changed and while he was keen to work, he now struggled to make his new goals fit with those of his employers. And getting fired was now harder to explain than it might have been were he still drinking.

Matwey says he has found a “profound freedom” in the experience, but that his future is one he’s uncertain about. What he does know is that he will keep trying to find a true purpose in life. He is certain it is there to be grasped.

There is plenty of food for thought here. Matwey has set the table and everyone can partake.

A portion of the proceeds from sales of this book goes to help the Guelph charity Bracelet of Hope. Matwey will be signing copies of his book on Saturday, March 31 (all day) at the Budd’s store on Wyndham Street in downtown Guelph. Copies can also be purchased through the author’s website at <http://testimonyontap.com>.

— reviewed by Jon Fear

CHILDREN

GO OUT AND PLAY!
By Darell Hammond
(Candlewick Press, \$13 softcover)



If you can’t wait for your kids to head back to school on Monday, it’s obvious they’ve been indoors too much this March break week.

Thanks to last weekend’s time change and the current springlike temperatures, there’s no reason for your children and their friends not to be playing outside and getting some exercise — plus, a little sun and fresh air in the process.

But what is there to do?

Lots, according to Darell Hammond, the founder of KABOOM!, an American non-profit group that emphasizes the importance of play in the social and physical development of children.

“Sadly, play is disappearing from the lives of far too many children,” Hammond says, largely due to too much “screen time” and

parental concerns about neighbourhood safety.

“Children who play are fitter and more creative, learn how to play well with others, and do better in school. Most important, children who play are happier,” says Hammond, who created this guide to more than 70 outdoor games.

Remember shadow tag and Marco Polo? Kick the can, four square, wall ball, around the world and capture the flag?

Instructions for playing each game are found in the book, as well as ways to encourage and facilitate outdoor play.

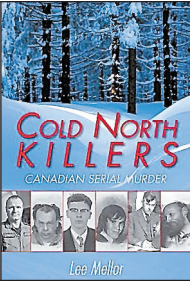
— Brenda Hoerle, Record staff

IN BRIEF . . .

COLD NORTH KILLERS: CANADIAN SERIAL MURDER
By Lee Mellor
(Dundurn Press, 470 pages, \$26.99 softcover)

Billed as the first book to deal exclusively with Canadian serial murderers, *Cold North Killers* is “a didactic encyclopedia” that arranges capsule accounts of this country’s most notorious serial slayers (along with a lot of less well known names) in thematic chapters that address subjects such as the nature versus nurture debate, victimology, and police investigation methods.

Mellor, who lives in Brighton,



Ont., gives himself an extra large field to work with by defining a serial killer as someone who has killed at least twice (usually the magic number is three) and including American killers who did some work in this country.

This is a useful sourcebook that covers the subject responsibly, without being exploitative or sensational.

— reviewed by Alex Good

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