

Morton wins inaugural poetry award

Times Colonist April 17, 2010

In recognition of her "vital and enduring" contribution to West Coast poetry, Sooke's Wendy Morton has been named the first recipient of the Spirit Bear Award.

"I can think of no one who has so dedicated her life to this Island's literary community," said Patrick Lane, who co-founded the biannual tribute with his partner Lorna Crozier, and the encouragement of poets all over the west coast of B.C.

Morton is a literary treasure, he said, and a dynamic force in the literature of this country. "She has raised the awareness of people, helping them discover their own stories and songs through the art of the poem.

"A passionate advocate for poetry and the richness it brings to people's lives, she is most deserving of this inaugural award."

Morton was honoured at a surprise event held in the Black Stilt Coffee House last night, with Victoria Mayor Dean Fortin and Times Colonist editor-in-chief Lucinda Chodan helping her celebrate, and offering words of congratulation. She was given a Spirit Bear box carved by John Mugford.

The Sooke author has long been a vital and effective literary leader.

She has not only written four books of poetry and a memoir, but she conceived a popular reading series, Planet Earth Poetry, which is in its second decade. She spearheaded the naming of a Victoria Poet Laureate, and envisioned and founded Random Acts of Poetry, an annual event that has gone viral across Canada, even infecting the U.K. It's a celebration of poetry and literacy that has poets "committing" readings in malls, offices, bus shelters, hockey rinks and classrooms.

"Poetry is the shortest distance between two hearts," said the passionate Morton, who has also been WestJet's Poet of the Skies, and taught poetry at the Victoria Read Society.

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