

Richard Van Camp's writer-in-residence term at Athabasca University ends on October 31. On behalf of the writer-in-residence committee and all of AU, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to him for his energetic and inspiring presence at our university this past year. Before he left, Paul Huebener and I engaged him in one last conversation about the writing life. Below is our conversation. –Angie Abdou

PH/AA: You've written books in a number of genres, from short stories to graphic novels. When you have an idea for a story, is it a dilemma to choose one form over another?

Richard Van Camp: The story is always the boss. I'm lucky to work with 12 different publishers so when I get an idea, I usually write everything first before sending out to who I think would love to publish it. I do love it, though, when one of my publishers or a new one writes to me with a page count, a deadline, a theme and an advance to get to work on something new. I live for deadlines!! :)

PH/AA: Are graphic novels just as "serious" or "literary" as conventional novels and short stories? What can you accomplish in a graphic novel that you might not be able to accomplish in a non-visual form?

Richard Van Camp: Oh yes: a graphic novel is holding a movie in your hands. Someone told me that once. Who was it? If this was you, please let me know. It's a great line and it's true. You can write a graphic novel and not have to spend 7 years raising 2.2 millions dollars to shoot it. You can sit in your office and work with your dream artist (like Menton3, Steven Sanderson, Krystal Mateus, Scott Henderson, Chris Auchter, Nicholas Burns, and many of the other artists I've been so blessed to work with on my comics and graphic novels) and go bananas.

PH/AA: Discussions about Indigenous literature often tend to focus on the way that the stories reflect the impacts of the residential schools and other harms. Is there a balance between focusing on these concerns and, at the same time, not limiting the other themes or genres that Indigenous writers might pursue?

Richard Van Camp: A great question: I think there has been an explosion of Indigenous literature these past 22 years and there are now titles out there for everyone. Want spec fiction terror? Try Waubgeshig Rice's *The Moon of Crusted Snow*. Want erotica? Get ready for Tenille Campbell. Want spiritual terror and kick ass humor? Try Eden Robinson.

PH/AA: You've said that you're at a stage of your career where it's time for you to give back and help aspiring writers with their work. Describe what you do as a writing mentor. What parts of writing can be taught? What are the limitations of such mentorship?

Richard Van Camp: I love it when someone sends me their writing, and it is heart and soul and a dream coming true. I love giving homework so writers can either be inspired or so they can see what's already been accomplished in that genre by another writer. I think every single writer out there is looking to be taken seriously and I do my best to really help a writer with what they are working on.

PH/AA: Who were your important mentors when you began writing? What did you learn from them?

Richard Van Camp: Oh my: I just loved getting lost in the works of Pat Conroy, Stephen King, SE Hinton. I also loved comics and magazines for the world building, artwork and narratives that took me years to collect and read. Look at *Savage Tales*, *Epic*, *Heavy Metal*. I just couldn't believe how cool it was to sit down in a sunbeam on a Sunday afternoon and read comics for hours and hours or go to bed early just so you could read another 100 pages of *Christine*, *The Dead Zone*, *The Outsiders*, *The Lords of Discipline*.

PH/AA: You have published 22 books and worked in many genres. What challenges still keep you excited about writing? What's next for Richard Van Camp?

Richard Van Camp: I've just put the finishing touches on my novel, *The Grass Dancer*. It's my first major oh my god novel since *The Lesser Blessed*. It's 335 pages. Now comes the hard part: finding the right publisher who can take it where it belongs. I'm also working on my graphic novel series *Wheetago War*. It just keeps growing. It's my Game of Thrones. It's epic!! I do have six books coming out in the next four to five years so I'll be busy touring and working with my editors and publishers to create gorgeous books we can all be proud of.

PH/AA: What are some of the highlights of your year with AU?

Richard Van Camp: If I can just say how proud I am to have worked with such great writers as Shane Turgeon, Leif Gregersen, Diana Gaviria, Liana Ryan, Leslie Ann Jones, Marya Leslie, Deb Jamer, Joshua Stacey and Deb Doyle during my time as Writer in Residence. There are so many more writers, too. They've kept me inspired in my own work and they deserve my praise. I want to thank everyone who sent me their manuscripts and stories. All of you sent me soul magic.

Mahsi cho.

I am grateful.