

June Callwood: A Life of Action

About the Author

For 25 years Anne Dublin taught in places as far away as Nairobi, Kenya. She planned to retire to a place with a swimming pool, but then writing crept up on her.

The child of Holocaust survivors, Dublin was born in a displaced persons' camp in Salzburg, Austria, and arrived in Toronto when she was very young. Throughout her childhood, she longed to become a dancer, and eventually received a BFA in dance at the University of Wisconsin.

Dublin then returned to Toronto where she earned an elementary school teaching certificate at Toronto Teachers' College. After years of teaching children's literature to kids, she tapped into her childhood experiences to write her first novel, *Written on the Wind*. It was based on events surrounding Hurricane Hazel, the disaster which struck Toronto in 1954.

Dublin has written three biographies about fascinating women—Lucy Maud Montgomery, Bobbie Rosenfeld, and June Callwood. In 2005, Dublin was awarded the National Chapter of Canada IODE Violet Downey Award for *Bobbie Rosenfeld: The Olympian Who Could Do Everything*. Dublin also writes articles, book reviews, and short stories for adults. She is particularly interested in topics about resourceful women characters, history, and the Holocaust. She often speaks to adults and children about writing.

A mother of three grown daughters, Dublin works as a librarian in Toronto. She is currently working on two new books.

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Author Interview

What made you start writing?

Writing came at me from different directions—teaching, reading, and storytelling.

How did teaching influence you?

When I taught English, I loved reading children's books, and even came to prefer them to adult literature.

How did storytelling lead to writing?

My parents told stories of their lives before World War II in Poland, and what it was like to be an immigrant in Toronto. Later I took courses in storytelling. In one of the classes, the teacher asked for us to tell about an incident from our childhood. I remembered my father's sewing machine in the cellar, and how he told me stories there. I used that incident in my first book, *Written on the Wind*.

Are there other ways in which your background has inspired you?

There's an expression in Hebrew, *tikkun olam*. It means to repair the world, and it's why I write—to find a way to repair what is broken; to show people that there's hope in spite of suffering. June talks about how people's actions are like throwing a stone in the pond. We can all make a difference in the world.

Do you think the idea of tikkun olam is idealistic?

Of course it is. But I also believe that we must learn to recognize the reality of situations, then try to change things for the better.

What interests you about writing biography for kids?

One of the goals of biography is to learn how people keep going in the face of all kinds of problems. Tough things often happen to young people. They need to learn how other people cope and to find the strength to go on with their lives.

Can you think of a reason you were drawn to write biographies about women as different as Lucy Maud Montgomery, Bobbie Rosenfeld and June Callwood?

I wrote the biography about L.M. Montgomery because I loved her books when I was a kid, and because she was a writer as I hoped to be. Bobbie Rosenfeld fascinated me because of the similarities between her life and mine. She's was older than I am, but we're both Jewish immigrants who came to Canada when we were very young. She overcame a lot of problems in her life, as I've tried to do. With June Callwood, my personal connection isn't as obvious. She's Catholic and grew up in a small town—quite different from me. I admired June because she knows how to transform an idea into reality. She worked hard, gathered people around her to create change, and made the world a better place.

You write that “June Callwood has been an inspiration and a blessing.” Can you give an example?

June focuses her mind 100 percent on the moment. She's not afraid to try new things, even if she fails. She knows that you have to work hard in order to succeed.

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Questions for Discussion

1. (a) What events were turning points in June's life?
(b) Have you experienced a turning point in your life? Describe it.
2. What did June mean when she said, “I decided I was a church, too.” (p. 61)
3. “Feminism gradually ‘sneaked up’ on June as she wrote about issues like abortion, day care centers, and the scarcity of women in politics.”
(a) What does feminism mean?
(b) How does it apply to your life?
4. June said, “There's no improvement in the human condition in replacing discrimination against women with discrimination against men.” (p. 68-69)
Is there a risk of this happening in today's society? Explain.
5. “[People with AIDS] are this century's lepers. No one wants to touch them.” (p. 85)
Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
6. Name three things you or people in your community could do to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.
7. June's father could only find a job threshing wheat for \$1 per day during harvest time in the decade known as the “Dirty Thirties.” In 1933 as many as 32 percent of Canadian workers were unemployed.
How did poverty affect June when she was a teenager and later in her life?

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8. Name three things you or your friends could do to alleviate homelessness in your community.
9. June said, “The only way to make the world safer for yourself is to treat other people well. It takes hard work and thoughtfulness. Be brave. Give everything a try if it isn’t harmful to others.” Explain how you can make the world a safer place for yourself and others.
10. A biography should describe the strengths and weaknesses of a person. In your opinion, did this biography of June Callwood succeed in doing so? Explain.