



WRITERS IN CONVERSATION



Write from the Heart: An Interview with Brian Wrixon, a Poet from Canada

Ajit Kumar

Brian Wrixon, a poet, was born in 1946 in Toronto, Canada. He graduated from Laurentian University in Canada with a degree in Classical Studies, and is a former faculty member, online curriculum design consultant and program coordinator at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario. His working career in the financial services business spanned 40 years. He has contributed his poems to numerous collections of poetry. Apart from this, as a poet and author, he has written and self-published through his own company Brian Wrixon Books - Canada, Poetry in Motion Volumes 1 & 2 (B.W. Books 2011), Confessions of a Would-Be Poet (B.W. Books, January 23, 2012), Heartbeats, Footsteps & Musings (B. W. Books, March 26, 2012), Doors (B. W. Books, February 8, 2013), Down to the Sea in Words (B. W. Books, April 15, 2013), The Moving Finger Writes (B. W. Books, May 13, 2013), Sculptured Words (B. W. Books, May 28, 2013), A Tisket, a Tasket, Poems in a Basket (B. W. Books, July 6, 2013), It's a Sign of the Times (B. W. Books, July 18, 2013), Nightmares & Dreams (with Rollie Mukherjee) (B. W. Books, September 21, 2013), Shoot From the Hip: Memories of a Small Town (B. W. Books, October 22, 2013), A Return Ticket: Memories of Leaving a Small Town (2013), My Passage to India (B. W. Books, May 28, 2014), A Look at Yesterday (with Robert Vincent) (B. W. Books, June 23, 2014), Our Town Revisited (with Robert Vincent) (B. W. Books, August 26, 2014) and Desperate Freedom: a Play in Four Acts (B. W. Books, August 4, 2014).

Apart from composing a good number of poems, he has edited many anthologies of poems and operates as a publisher as well. In addition to writing and publishing numerous poetry and prose works of his own, he has been instrumental in assisting hundreds of young and emerging authors from around the world get published, either personally or as contributors to group anthologies. Brian has been married for almost 45 years to Dr Cheryl Wrixon, an educational consultant, and they are fortunate to live nearby their children and grandchildren. Their extended family includes five children sponsored through Chalice Canada, three in Africa, one in Haiti and one in India.

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Dr. Ajit Kumar has interviewed Brian Wrixon on 8 September 2014. He shares his experience and ideas on being a poet. His contributions show that he wants to bring a new wave of poetry in the post-modern world. He has answered each question frankly, with great patience.

Ajit Kumar: Could you please share your familial and educational background?

Brian Wrixon: I was born in the big city of Toronto at the end of WW2 but it wasn't long afterwards that my family moved to a small mining town in northern Canada. We lived in the wilderness of lakes and forests and my father spent his entire career in the mining business. Unless you wanted to be a miner, you had to leave our town to make your way in the world. Like so many others, I moved away for an education and a career. My dream was to become an archaeologist but my hopes of doing so were dashed when a war in the Middle East resulted in the cancellation of my scholarship and student visa. I attended post-graduate school in Southern Ontario, but was asked to leave the campus before finishing my graduate degree because I was viewed as something of a radical. I have always been rather proud of that fact because there were so many others who were likewise branded in the late 1960s. I considered myself in good company! The one crowning achievement of my year in graduate school is the fact that I met and married a lovely girl who was working on her PhD in the same department. We are still together some 44 years later. When I got kicked out of school I took a summer job with an insurance company and some 40 years later, I retired as the Vice President of a similar firm in charge of running the operation. Things didn't turn out too badly!

Ajit Kumar: When did you start writing poetry?

Brian Wrixon: I wrote my first poem over 30 years ago and it was published in the company magazine. It wasn't until seven years ago that I picked up the pen once more and started writing poetry. I had suffered a rather serious injury in an accidental fall and my future recovery was uncertain. I found myself dealing with depression and turned to poetry as a form of therapy. I started to write every day and eventually it became a habit. I pulled myself out of 'the dark night of the soul' and just continued to write after I recovered from both the injury and the gloom.

Ajit Kumar: Why did you choose poetry than fiction?

Brian Wrixon: I found that I was able to express my inner feelings better with poetry than with prose. Poetry gives one the opportunity to put images on paper without having to worry about complete sentences, grammatical correctness and the strict rules and confines that were drilled into us in our school language classes. I had written a lot of prose during my business career, things like product descriptions, presentations and speeches. I wanted to get away from that and chose poetry as my medium because it was different and more suited to

what I wanted to accomplish. Since that time, I now find myself moving back and forth between poetry and prose.

Ajit Kumar: Who inspires you to write poetry?

Brian Wrixon: Well I would suggest that my inspiration is more than just 'who'. Poetry is all about connections, the connections that we have with people, places, things, events, feelings and actions. All of those connections create images in our minds and stirrings in our hearts. All of us have those connections. Some of us are silly or bold enough to take those images and stirrings and to put them on paper. Those people we call poets.

Ajit Kumar: What do you read as a background to your poetry?

Brian Wrixon: I am an avid reader and usually have three or four books on the go at one time. I generally gravitate towards Victorian-era writers and emerging modern writers from foreign countries whose works have been translated into English.

Ajit Kumar: Before publishing your own collection of poems, you contributed a good number of poems to other collections of poetry and journals of English studies. How long did you take to bring out your own collection of poems?

Brian Wrixon: My first complete collection of my own poetry was *Heartbeats, Footsteps & Musings* (2012). It took me five years of continuous writing and re-writing before I brought out this initial collection.

Ajit Kumar: Please tell us about the symbols you have used in your collection of poems, *Heartbeats, Footsteps & Musings*.

Brian Wrixon: This collection is divided into several sections and features my poetry on the subjects of love, nature, war & peace, history, travel, the arts and life. These are the aspects of my life with which I have special connections and through which I find my inspiration.

Ajit Kumar: What made you to prepare your poems of emotions in *Poetry in Motion Volumes 1 & 2*?

Brian Wrixon: The two volumes of *Poetry in Motion* were created as a result of the work that I had done on a blog of the same name. My wife Cheryl and I are world travellers and I am an amateur photographer in addition to being a writer. For the period of two years I wrote a daily blog about some place that we had visited and I included several photos with each entry as well as a poem about either the place or the experience. When I closed down the blog, I collected all those entries and published them in the two volumes so that I and my family would have a permanent record of what I had written. By the time I had finished with my blog, I had received hits from thousands of readers in over 60 countries around the world.

That told me that people wanted to read what I wanted to write and provided me with the encouragement to continue.

Ajit Kumar: Do you include autobiographical elements in your poems?

Brian Wrixon: Yes, most of my poetry is about me, or at least about how those connections that I talked about before have affected me.

Ajit Kumar: What kind of confessions have you mentioned in your poetry *Confessions of a Would-Be Poet*?

Brian Wrixon: I talked about how striking out on my own at the tender age of 13 has affected my life and the choices that I have made. I talked about how love plays such an integral role in my life and the strength that one can derive from a warm and loving relationship. I also talked about the role that my brief encounter with depression played in turning my attention to poetry as a medium for my feelings.

Ajit Kumar: You said, 'warm and loving relationship.' Would you please share a few lines where you have pointed out this aspect?

Brian Wrixon: In answer to your question, here is a poem of mine called 'The Choice':

The Choice

**When my busy life I scrutinize
And look on self, with inward eyes
I know my time forever flies
And there is so much more to do**

**When my true love I contemplate
And gaze on her with affection great
I know to love her is my fate
And I have much more love to give**

**If time demanded a choice to make
I choose love o'er work for my love's sake
For loving less and doing more
Would wound my heart to its very core**

Ajit Kumar: What are the basics which you feel are essential for a poet?

Brian Wrixon: I have told many people that I think the true poet writes for him or herself and not for an audience. Few people can make a living writing poetry and I do not believe that making money is the driver. I write for myself, not for you. If you get enjoyment from what I write, then that's just an added bonus. My poem means to me what it means to me and may mean something entirely different to you. I don't really care that you don't get my meaning because you get your own and that should be what is important to you. It's like singing in the shower – I sing for my benefit only. Now if the gardener or the trash collector happens to be in my yard and my song slips out the bathroom window and they get entertained by it, so be it. If a large crowd shows up in my yard every day while I sing in the shower, I may re-evaluate the economic potential of my ability.

Ajit Kumar: You came as an optimist in *Doors*. What message did you want to give to your readers?

Brian Wrixon: I was reviewing my collection of photographs after one of our trips and I was surprised at the number of pictures that I had taken of doors. I then looked at my poetry and to my amazement found that I often wrote about new adventures, standing on the brink of something new, taking chances, exploring new vistas and similar ideas. In my book *Doors*, I decided to combine my photos and my poetry. My basic message for my readers is that it is so important to stop passing by both open and closed doors as part of a too-busy life, and instead to stop and open a new door and walk through it. That is where life truly is found.

Ajit Kumar: Your love towards nature is seen in *Down to the Sea in Words*. How do you view your philosophy of nature?

Brian Wrixon: We are all part of the world and are one with the world. Nature must be protected and preserved and if we don't do it, who will? The older I get the more reluctant I become to kill anything. Consider me silly, but if I find a spider in my home I will very carefully catch it and release it outdoors. My philosophy is that I didn't create it, so I don't have the right to destroy it. That philosophy was underscored for me recently while visiting a Jain Temple in the market in Old Delhi, India.

Ajit Kumar: Apart from this, which collection do you feel that is the closest to the nature?

Brian Wrixon: *A Tisket, a Tasket, Poems in a Basket* is entirely focused on nature and in particular on the wonders of the world of flowers. I get great writing inspiration from viewing, photographing and thinking about these marvels of the natural world.

Ajit Kumar: Whom do you like to read the most?

Brian Wrixon: As I said before, my favourite authors are Victorian-era writers like Charles Dickens, the Brontes, George Eliot, Robert Louis Stevenson, Wilkie Collins, Richard Doddridge

Blackmore, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry James, Herman Melville and later Victorian/early Edwardian writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad.

Ajit Kumar: Do you notice the effect of these authors in your poetry?

Brian Wrixon: It is interesting that these are all prose writers, not poets. But most importantly, they are all great story tellers, each with a unique ability to choose the right words at the right time and to turn a phrase most eloquently. Though they write prose and not poetry, the lessons that they teach and the examples of excellence that they demonstrate have shown me that the same degree of attention to detail is required of the poet. I try to emulate their professionalism in my own writing.

Ajit Kumar: Your collection of poems *The Moving Finger Writes* is an inspirational one. What made you write this?

Brian Wrixon: The book takes its name from verse 51 of Edward FitzGerald's translation of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám:

**The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.**

These poems are all about the joy, agony and satisfaction that comes from writing. I chose to illustrate the book mainly with photos of graffiti. Graffiti is an art form like poetry, insofar as it is both admired by many and reviled by others, all over the world.

Ajit Kumar: You titled one of your collections *Sculptured Words*. Do you think that words of poets make an impact on the minds of the readers?

Brian Wrixon: *Sculptured Words* is a collection that marries my poetry with images of stone work and sculpture that I have found on my world travels. My hope is that my words will have as much impact and longevity on those who read them as these statues in marble and stone have had on those who view them. But as I said before, the impact or the message that I send with my words is not necessarily the message that is received by the reader, and that's OK with me. Poetry is a different kind of communication device. When we communicate, we try to ascertain through feedback from the listener that what we have said has been heard and understood. I do not think that closing that loop is essential with poetry. My message and your understanding of it may be entirely different. In other words, poetry is personal, both for the writer and for the reader.

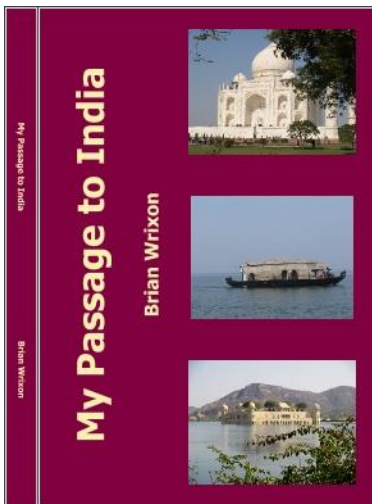
Ajit Kumar: What are the most inspiring facts while composing *It's a Sign of the Times*?

Brian Wrixon: This book is a tongue-in-cheek look at some of the different signs, inscriptions and public notices that I have come across while travelling. Some of them are serious poems but many of them are spoofs. They just go to support my point that a poet can find inspiration in anything.

Ajit Kumar: How do you plan your anthology of poems? I mean do you decide the number of poems and length of poems for a poetry book?

Brian Wrixon: I first pick a theme that touches me and then I start to write. I should say that I then start to think, and then I write. By the time I put pen to paper, I have pretty well composed the entire poem in my head. I then write it out and then edit and re-write, but usually make only minor changes. Most of my poems are quite short and I try to keep each book at somewhere near 100 pages. The feedback that I have had from readers is that they prefer a book about this size. A shorter book is also more affordable although I don't worry too much about sales. In fact, I generally post the entire book as a preview on the printer's site so that people can read it all without having to buy it. I personally operate my publishing endeavour on a not-for-profit basis by choice.

Ajit Kumar: What experience made you to compose *My Passage to India*?



Brian Wrixon: Well now you have touched on another of my life's great passions – India. I first travelled to India in January 2013. I was invited to read some of my poems at the inaugural Delhi Poetry Festival and I wanted to attend the Jaipur Literary Festival. I visited the Golden Triangle consisting of Delhi, Agra and Jaipur and fell in love with the country and its people. I returned in February 2014, this time spending my time in Kerala. I had the opportunity to visit friends and to meet with several people who had started small businesses. We had some great discussions, sharing ideas on how to manage and grow a new business, a skill set that I had developed during my working career. I returned to India in October 2014 and I was invited to give 3 public lectures in my city here in Canada, talking about my experiences in India.

Ajit Kumar: Would you please recite three or four lines of this collection about India?

Brian Wrixon: 'My own passage to India has been one of personal growth and discovery. I have learned that India stands ready with her arms opened wide and that a visitor to this

wonderful country must be prepared to open his or her mind just as wide. Rather than being an assault on the senses, India is a land of unique discovery. I went to India to discover a country – instead I found both a country and a people, a very friendly people to be sure.'

Ajit Kumar: Could you please share the central concept of your poetry

Brian Wrixon: I provide the reader with an opportunity to look at the world and its component parts through my set of eyeballs. I freely admit that those eyeballs are often shaded with rose-coloured glasses as I generally view things more positively than negatively.

Ajit Kumar: Sir, where does your poetry originate from?

Brian Wrixon: My poetry comes solely from my heart, other than for some experimental poetry that I have tried or for my attempts to write in a strict poetic regimen like Haiku.

Ajit Kumar: How do you view today's literature? What is the recent trend in poetry?

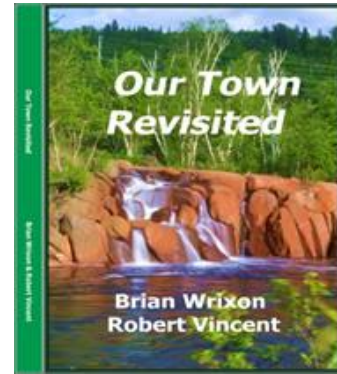
Brian Wrixon: I am pleased to say that interest in both writing and reading poetry is on the rise. A couple of years ago I started an international writers' group on Facebook called Poets with Voices Strong. Here we are a short time later and we have 1500 members. I suggest a topic for a group anthology and before long I have well over 100 contributors for the new book. It wasn't that many years ago that one would not admit to reading poetry, yet alone announce to the world that you were writing the stuff! A craft like writing poetry improves over time and I am pleased to see that there are many opportunities through social media for people to practice and publish their craft. The advent of print-on-demand publishing companies has resulted in more opportunities for people to see themselves in book form as well.

Ajit Kumar: Do you feel poetry as the best form for expressing ideas?

Brian Wrixon: Poetry is only one form of expressing ideas and it may be the best form, depending on the idea that one wishes to express. There are some ideas that I write that simply must be expressed in prose and for which poetry would be entirely inappropriate.

Ajit Kumar: What concept did you have while composing *Our Town Revisited* (with Robert Vincent)?

Brian Wrixon: Robert and I both grew up in the same small mining town. He is a great photographer. We pooled our efforts to combine his photos of our old home town with my poetry about growing up there. We did the book mainly for our friends. At its peak our town of Levack had a total population of 3,142. A couple of us started a Facebook group of people from our town who wanted to stay in touch – we have 1600 members!! Most of us left and many of us have never returned. Bob and I wanted to give people a chance to ‘go back home’ and that’s what led to *Our Town Revisited*.



Ajit Kumar: How does your wife view your efforts?

Brian Wrixon: She shakes her head marvelling at the success that I have achieved but mainly she is delighted at the time I spend on writing and publishing because it keeps me out of her hair!

Ajit Kumar: What are the challenges a poet faces being in Canada?

Brian Wrixon: Few people really appreciate poetry so readership levels are not high. Poetry is not a subject that is well supported in our school system so the next generation of writers and readers is in jeopardy. Unless one has been short-listed for the Griffin Prize or is in the running for the Nobel Prize for Literature, the most that one can expect from a publisher is a rejection slip. I expect that these are the same challenges faced by poets everywhere in the world.

Ajit Kumar: You have promoted many young and experienced poets by editing many anthologies of poems for them. What idea do you have behind this?

Brian Wrixon: Doing so gives me the chance to perhaps lower some of the roadblocks or to overcome the challenges that I have referred to above. Life has been good to me and I have been truly blessed over the years with love, family, career, success, money etc. Helping some of these emerging writers is just my way of giving back.

Ajit Kumar: What made you to establish your own press?

Brian Wrixon: It gives me a chance to be creative, although it does sometimes interfere with my own writing. I have the printer’s complete book production software on my computer and I have the opportunity to create an entire book from scratch – cover, layouts, font, illustrations, the whole thing. I had my latest book delivered into my hands today and I simply cannot express in words the joy that comes from holding that creation in my hands. I knew that if I started my own press that I could allow others to experience that same joy. I

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donate my time to create their books and it costs them nothing to come to print. Unlike the case with many other publishers, there is no requirement for people to buy any fixed number of copies of their books. So they win and I win – who could ask for anything more?

Ajit Kumar: What are you planning next as a poet?

Brian Wrixon: Actually, my next book is going to be something different, a collection of humorous short stories. From the point of view of poetry, I am in discussions with my writers' group to come up with a theme for our anthologies for 2015.

Ajit Kumar: Did you ever think that you would come as one of the prominent poets of the world?

Brian Wrixon: Thanks, but I will answer that question if it ever happens.

Ajit Kumar: Any message would you like to give to your readers and young writers?

Brian Wrixon: Write from the heart and write every day!

Ajit Kumar: Thanks for your time Brian Sir!

Brian Wrixon: Thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

Dr. Ajit Kumar holds his PhD. on Doris Lessing from Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, India. He has had many research papers published in national and international refereed journals and anthologies of English studies. He has two books to his credit, Feminine Issues: In the Writing of British Female Authors and Fragmented Societies: Feminism, Love and Identity in the Novels of Doris Lessing. He has interviewed many poets and authors from USA, UK, Ireland, Canada and India.

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