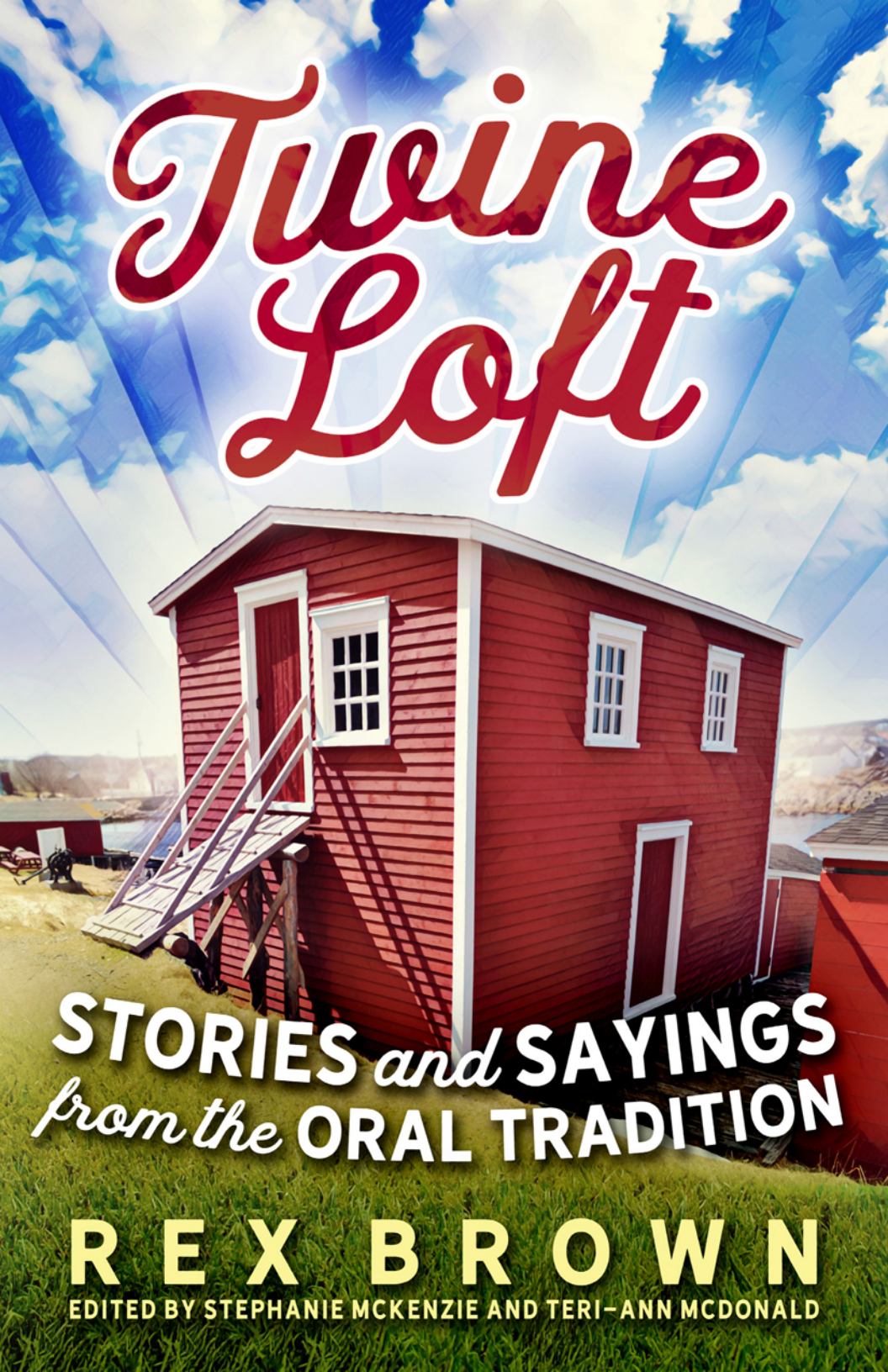




Twine Loft

STORIES *and* **SAYINGS**
from the **ORAL TRADITION**

R E X B R O W N

EDITED BY STEPHANIE MCKENZIE AND TERI-ANN MCDONALD

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PRAISE FOR REX BROWN

Out from the Harbour

“*Out from the Harbour* is a vivid description of life in Tack’s Beach. The author goes into great detail to describe his beloved Tack’s Beach so much so that you feel like you are actually walking on the beach.” — EDWARDS BOOK CLUB REVIEWS

“*Out from the Harbour* is as enjoyable as it is educational.” — THE ADVERTISER (GRAND FALLS)

“Everything is described in loving detail, from how to make a baseball last longer to how molasses was measured when being poured from the barrel. A book to be enjoyed, it may help some people to change their opinion about resettlement and small almost self-sufficient communities.”

— THE GUARDIAN (PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND)

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Afterword by Stephanie McKenzie

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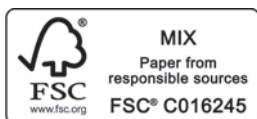
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We acknowledge the [financial] support of the Government of Canada. *Nous reconnaissons l'appui [financier] du gouvernement du Canada.* We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country. *Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.* We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation for our publishing activities.

For Jill and Jim, who appreciate their roots.

*We had Billy Hanlon for shantyman too
And all the Bay knows what Billy can do
When he sings in the cove in the fall of the year
All the gulls from Gull Island come out for to hear.*

— “The Riverhead Launching,” 1935

twine loft: room or area of fishing premises in which nets are stored and repaired; NET n: ~ LOFT. 1917 *Christmas Bells* 15 Go down to the twine loft and give those fellows working there a dram, but mind you make them mix it with water. 1936 SMITH 181 And of course there were the traps to repair in the twine loft again.

—*Dictionary of Newfoundland English*

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Introduction

The odd person, while fully acknowledging that the past is “a bucket of ashes,” is still inclined to root among them, not to rekindle any flame but, rather, to celebrate that there are ashes to root through. For someone born in Newfoundland while we were still ourselves—not yet one distinct part of Canada—the rooting might be perceived as nostalgic or, worse still, nationalistic, but I think not. It has to do with attachment to place. And of course, there is no place without people. My hallowed Tack’s Head is scenery, endlessly duplicated across a wider, beautiful world. But it’s more than scenery to me. People wandered about once upon a time; their voices are ashes now, but I hear them still. I want to share what I hear, so I write.

There is something else, too—something that has little to do with place, or else it’s all to do with place. I speak of the oral tradition, the celebration of the spoken word. Spoken words that are meant to be heard, embraced by the mouth and the ear. This is somewhat out of fashion today, to be sure, when speak-

ing within earshot plays a far lesser role than it once did; when listening to someone telling you a story is, for many, a challenge, maybe a bore; when what is told, not the telling, is paramount. True of most, but not of those of us wired to be “out for to hear,” those inclined to listen for the echoes from the ashes, those inclined to share the voices that resonate still.

Articulating what is there among the ashes can take a number of forms. Writing history is one. Historical accounts tend to draw broad strokes that brush over the details many crave. Bernice Morgan wondered what ordinary folk in her Newfoundland past might be up to as they lived their day-to-day lives, so she imagined it for herself, writing *Random Passage* and *Waiting for Time*. Donna Butt features drama at Theatre in the Bight to bring people from the past to the fore for her Trinity patrons. David Blackwood paints his past for all to view.

Unlike Bernice and Donna, I steer clear of fiction. The approach to mining the ashes here is anecdotal—a collection of stories and sayings from one person who has listened all his life telling what he recalls. All is recalled, not imagined. All the people named are real people. I sincerely trust that I have not offended, in any way, even one. All, dead or alive, are as dear to me now as when they were within earshot. I shudder to think that a reader might emerge from my words with even a tinge of lessened impression of anyone. All stand tall in my world. My attachment to time and place is not sustainable without all who inhabit it fully on side.

Hopefully the words add up to allow the reader to hear echoes of voices from the Newfoundland that no longer is and fill some of the details in for anyone out for to hear. I myself have

had a lifelong fascination with spoken words and written words read aloud. I allow that I came by it honest. People all along the way from Tack's Beach to university to Corner Brook have influenced my fascination.

The Tack's Beach of my childhood and youth in the 1950s and early 1960s offers a rich source of ashes to mine. In Julia Bolt's kitchen "over round the shore," I heard Billy Bolt spin "Jack Tales." All ended the same way: "the last time I saw them they were all sitting around a tin table; had that tin table been stronger, my story would have been longer but that tin table bended and so my story has ended." A rhyme worthy of Mother Goose. Over in The Shop (the general store owned by Dad and two of his brothers), especially on windy/rainy days, men such as Charlie Hapgood and Aubrey Penney would gather to yarn, sometimes for an entire afternoon. I would be seen, but not heard, until closing time. Their delivery trumped what was said. Preachers would pale in their presence. Every Christmas Eve, Bill Warren showed up and sang words for my brother Howard, "John, Go Cut Your Whitens." One Christmas season, a young Victor Green sang "The Wild Colonial Boy"—still a favourite of mine well over sixty years on. And then there was Pop Brown, Grandfather's brother, who sang in Julia Bolt's kitchen, in the pilothouse of the schooner *Anna V. Fagan*, and anywhere else where a drink might appear with ears around to hear. He sang for me for two summers as we beat about inner Placentia Bay in the longliner *Betty Kevin*. For him, one was audience enough. He scattered the occasional hymn in among "The Brule Song," "The Black Velvet Band," and dozens of others. Love at first hear.

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