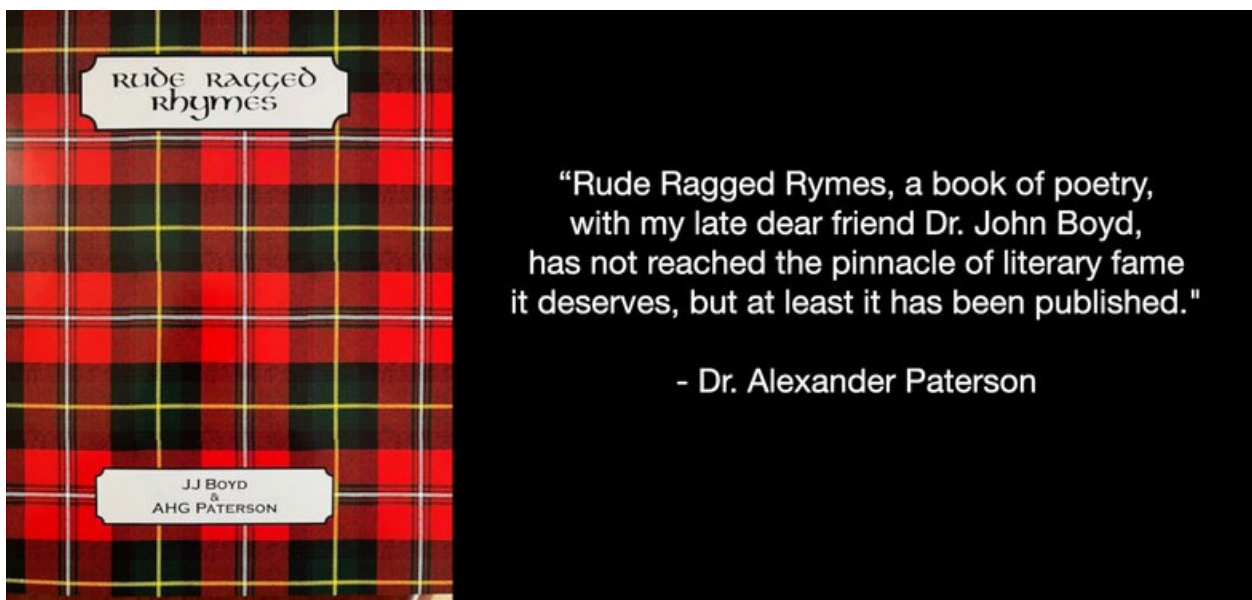


# Alberta Doctors' Digest

## A deep dive on publishing your book

This month I was going to review Alberta's *COVID19 Pandemic Response Final Report*. I was happy with my proposed title for the piece: *A camel is a horse designed by a committee*, but after reading through the introduction, methodology, nine chapters, the disclaimer, and end notes, I thought most of the proposed recommendations would be difficult to implement. Therefore, I decided it really was a lumpy horse designed by a committee. The clinical studies would take many years and the next pandemic might have quite different characteristics to COVID19. I'll leave the final report for others better qualified to review.

The other thing I've been up to this last three months is exploring the world of publishing. When I worked in the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton (1975-1990), I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take a sabbatical for four months. I received a provincial writing grant (1983) and applied to join a writers' group at the Banff Centre for the Arts, led by authors W.O. Mitchell and Alistair Macleod.



Rude Ragged Rymes, a book of poetry, by Dr. Alexander Paterson and the late Dr. John Boyd

I remember W.O. (as everyone called him) saying that he'd met many writers who dreamt of writing a great novel or screenplay, but most will achieve a more lasting success by writing a book on their family history or a history of their favourite team, activity or club, which, if written and produced well, will last several hundred years. However, most books on the New York Times Best Seller listings will be lucky to survive half a generation!

Many of us at a certain stage feel the urge to publish a book that will record our hard-collected wisdom for the edification of posterity.

This impulse has occurred to me several times and has been realized in a modified form with the publication of *Rude Ragged Rymes*, a book of poetry, with my late dear friend Dr. John Boyd (published by College Copy, Edmonton) and a book for children with illustrations by my son, *Michael and the Coal Sprite* (published by Blitzprint, Calgary). Neither of these publications has reached the pinnacle of literary fame they deserve, but at least they've been published.

Hence the last three months of exploring the world of publishing. The book to be published might come under the category of heritage publications, and in this case, is the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Calgary Robert Burns Club.

Few people celebrate their culture with a poet as the national hero, most preferring to honour a leader, or a significant event such as a battle. For Scotland, however, it's the lionizing of the poetic genius, Robert Burns, who lived from 1759 to 1796. The club's board decided that to celebrate this 50th anniversary a book would be published. The Calgary Burns Club is the second oldest registered club in Alberta (the Edmonton club is the first and the Medicine Hat club is the province's newest club).

A sub-committee of the club's legacy committee was formed and the chair of the legacy committee and the board appointed three editors. The first was a member with experience publishing a magazine, *The Claver*. The second was a member to take charge of the contributions from the Carnie Group (this being a group named for Bob Carnie, a published author, club member and University of Calgary English Department faculty member). And lastly, myself, to take charge of other contributions. This group is small enough to keep in contact easily, and large enough to divide the work into manageable loads.

One of the members of our editorial triumvirate who is facile and clever with computing and the internet, acts as the repository for articles that are near completion, lining them up under the various headings in the contents listing. The two remaining editors divide responsibilities for the contributions from members.

It's useful to make decisions on categories of content early on which makes it easier to determine the direction of the publication and easier to see our way through the potential layout of the book: preface, introduction, history of the club, a section on influential members, and a section on memorable events – such as the club's singers appearing at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo (2009) or the Kirkcudbright Tattoo (2022).

Other sections are listed, such as *Details of the Production of Miniature Burns Statues*. These statues are placed on each of the 40 tables (eight to 10 guests per table) at the annual dinner. The statue is given to one lucky guest at the table.

Deciding on overall categories of content is one thing, but getting articles written is quite another. Most club members are not keen on writing and are happy to leave that task to others. Those who may volunteer to write procrastinate and, in turn, make it hard to deliver an article on time for editing. When an article is received, editing has to be done carefully and diplomatically. Nobody enjoys having their efforts pulled apart by someone who is neither their schoolteacher nor literary superior, and who (in the critical eyes of the contributor) although called an editor, seems to know as much or as little as the

contributor about grammar, parsing, sentence or paragraph structure. The relationship has all the potential for resentment and grumbling, but it must be done.

We then come to the style and production of the book you wish to produce. This was discussed at a club meeting. When I gave a rough estimate of what we envisaged a properly produced book might cost, there were a few howls of protest.

“I’ve had two books produced for next to nothing by Amazon,” said one club member. “In fact, they may even do it for free,” he added.

Luckily, I’d previously phoned and talked to Amazon staff. While during the pandemic they did have special deals for writers who were seniors, the production was basic. You send in your book already typed up in the page sequence you desire and they would produce a cardboard covered booklet which may have a picture on the front and which is fan-bound (see below), but is not going to survive the culling of a lifetime’s collected items when the time comes to downsize and get rid of household clutter.

“This is not the type of book we have in mind, Alan,” I said. “We’re going for a more ambitious book. A properly bound book that will withstand the test of time. And also, you know, when you’re publishing something worthwhile you have to be able to access a person, someone you know, and have some trust in, for example a layout editor, to discuss any issues you might be having.”

So what about the style of book? This is where some experience of the language used by publishers is handy.

We decided on a publication which would grace a bookshelf or drawing room table (11 inches vertically by 8.5 inches horizontally). This is a common size for a larger book which includes photographs. We also felt that one reading column rather than two columns would make reading easier. We also thought that a false leather-bound book rather than paperback, cardboard or fabric would be preferable. As for the type of binding? Fan-binding is cheaper, but on opening the book the pages spring upwards like a fan and have to be flattened down with the hands. Oversewn binding is more expensive, but the pages on opening the book lie down neatly. That’s when talking to a recognized and experienced publisher comes in handy.

After phoning around several publishers in Calgary (including the University of Calgary publishing unit which quickly lost interest on realizing this was not an academic publication), we chose the Burke Group, an Edmonton-based publisher that has been in business since 1902. In this choice we had help from our dear friend, Marion Boyd, who has publishing experience, currently being involved in the team publishing *The first 30 years of Pilgrims Community Hospice in Edmonton* as well as a personal, beautifully produced leather-bound book of her own family’s history.

In contacting and discussing your book with a publisher you need to make some further decisions in order to get a rough estimate of the eventual cost and whether this will fit your budget.

Right. Having decided the dimensions of the book, what would you like as material for the covers? We decided we wanted faux leather (or “fox leather” as they say in the non-French, non-Quebec part of the industry). In order to do this efficiently we decided a visit to Burke was in order.

Four of us got into a car and drove to Edmonton, booked in at a hotel, slept well, and turned up at Burke’s Head office where we met with our account manager Kevin

Wilianto. We were given a tour round Burke, a major publisher of all kinds of material including magazines, pamphlets, programmes, concert tickets and advertising posters.

However, the company does not consider itself a “publisher” (since it doesn’t issue books for sale). In tune with modern circumlocution it sees itself as a “graphics communications provider.” We saw the myriad types of printing machinery in action, the binding and dispatch rooms, the offices, the layout and design editors, and content editorial staff and much more.

We then settled down to business. Kevin produced a series of samples of faux leather and we eventually agreed on one described as “russet” rather than a darker tan colour. As for the number of pages, we estimated between 150-175 consisting of approximately 550 words/page using Times New Roman text style, with a font size of 10 or 11. We’d have four end pages; two at the beginning and two at the end of the book using stiffer paper (Lynx, 100 lbs). For the text we’d have a lighter more flexible paper (Husky, 80 lbs). Paper is usually described in weight (e.g. lbs per 500 pieces, the 500 individual sheets of 20” x 26” if it weighs 80 lbs is labelled 80 lbs or rarely these days - 80#.)

“Grammage” is weight in grams per square metre - “gsm.” Up to 200 gsm implies “paper” and over 200 gsm implies “cardboard.” Coated paper has a waxier surface than uncoated. The glossy look is good for photos while uncoated conveys a warm historical feel to the words.

We intend to use some 40 to 50 photographs interspersed within the text, therefore, we require the services of a design or layout editor. We considered that 100 copies of the book would fulfil the requirement for a copy to each club member and as a reserve as gifts to visiting speakers and special guests.

All in all the visit to Burke was well worth it. It allowed for focused discussion and it created a relationship with the company, as well as getting many of our questions answered.

OK. How much is all this going to cost? For 100 books the estimate for the materials is around \$8,000. If you need to hire a layout editor to advise on chapter design, page layout, photography and picture integration, then add a further \$2,500. This brings the cost to around \$105/book. Since a few of the books may still be around in 2,500 A.D. when websites, podcasts and electronically produced magazines will be long gone, this is fairly good value.

So get your memoirs and life anecdotes into print for your future families, and just recall how often you’ve said to yourself and others: “Oh, how I wish I’d asked my mother, or father or grandparents about that.”

---

Editor’s note: The views, perspectives and opinions in this article are solely the author’s and do not necessarily represent those of the AMA.

Banner image credit: Pixabay.com