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Farley Mowat: A Canadian Legend

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by *Ronald Wolf*

Some people would say that Canadian authors could have a less than exciting life. In the case of Farley Mowat, this is the farthest from the truth.

Farley McGill Mowat is a conservationist and one of Canada's most widely-read authors. Mowat is the great grandnephew of Ontario Premier Sir Oliver Mowat. Farley grew up in Richmond Hill, Ont. where he attended Richmond Hill High School.

At the height of the Great Depression, the family relocated to Saskatoon, Sask.

At the age of 13, Mowat founded a nature newsletter, Nature Lore, and had a weekly column on birds in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix. During the Second World War, Mowat was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant into the Second Battalion, Hastings and Prince Edwards Regiment, affectionately known as the Hasty P's. He went overseas as a reinforcement officer for that regiment, joining the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom.

On July 1, 1943 he was a subaltern in command of a rifle platoon, and participated in the initial landings of Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily.

Mowat served throughout the campaign as a platoon commander, and moved to Italy in September 1943, seeing further combat until December 1943. He moved with the Division to Northwest Europe in early 1945. There, he worked as an intelligence agent in the Netherlands and went through enemy lines to start unofficial negotiations about food drops with General Blaskowitz. The food drops, under the code name Operation Manna, saved thousands of Dutch lives.

Mowat went through a phase of being very interested in Viking voyages to Canada, which resulted in the books West-Viking (1965), a controversial and largely debunked analysis of the Norse sagas trying to pin their accounts to specific Canadian geography, and The Curse of the Viking Grave (1968).

Farley Mowat was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1981. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society ship RV Farley Mowat was named in honour of him, and he frequently visits it to assist its mission, and has also provided financial support to the group.

Farley and his wife Claire currently live in Port Hope, Ont. part of Northumberland County, Ont. They spend their summers on a farm in Cape Breton, N.S.

To the best of my knowledge, Mowat has written 44 books from 1952 to 2008. He could very well be the most publicized Canadian author of our time.

People of the Deer (1952) The Regiment (1955) Lost in the Barrens (1956) The Dog Who Wouldn't Be (1957) Coppermine Journey: An Account of a Great Adventure (1958) Grey Seas Under: The Perilous Rescue Missions of a North Atlantic Salvage Tug (1959) The Desperate People (1959; revised 1999) Ordeal by Ice (1960) Owls in the Family (1961) The Serpent's Coil: An Incredible Story of Hurricane-Battered ships the Heroic Men Who Fought to Save Them (1961) The Black Joke (1962) Never Cry Wolf (1963) West-Viking (1965) The Curse of the Viking Grave (1966) Canada North (1967) The Polar Passion (1967) This Rock Within the Sea: A Heritage Lost (1968) The Boat Who Wouldn't Float (1969) The Siberians (1970) Sibir: My Discovery of Siberia (1970) A Whale for the Killing (1972) Tundra: Selections from the Great Accounts of Arctic Land Voyages (1973) Wake of the Great Sealers (1973) The Snow Walker (1975) Death of a People-the Ihalmiut (1975) Canada North Now: The Great Betrayal (1976) And No Birds Sang (1979) World of Farley Mowat (1980) Sea of Slaughter (1984) My Discovery of America (1985) Virunga: The Passion of Dian Fossey (1987) Woman in the Mists: The Story of Dian Fossey (1987) The New Founde Land (1989) Rescue the Earth: Conversations with the Green Crusaders (1990) My Father's Son (1993) Born Naked (1994) Aftermath: Travels in a Post-War World (1995) The Farfarers: Before the Norse (1998) The Alban Quest The Search for a Lost Tribe (1999) Walking on the Land (2000) High Latitudes: An Arctic Journey (2002) No Man's River (2004) Bay of Spirits: A Love Story (2006) Otherwise (2008).

Are there anymore books in his future? Only Mowat knows for sure.

Some people like Mowat have lived a lifetime before an undertaking a career that he will be remembered for a lifetime. These facts are reported in a place we call It's Our History, Our Country.

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