

# THE ARTS



Mike Thomas/Yukon News

IN PRINT... Keith Halliday wrote a children's book with the help of Kieran and Aline.

## Charming Yukon yarn in the works for a generation. Or two. Or four.

By Leighann Chalykoff  
News Reporter

**Y**ou never know what to expect when you arrive at Keith Halliday's house.

He could be hitting tennis balls on the makeshift court painted on the street out front.

He could be in the garage hosting a Bat Club meeting — a school-curriculum-enhancing project he's started with some neighbourhood kids where they study the nocturnal critters.

Or he could be sitting in his upstairs office spinning stories from Yukon history into epic adventures.

His first children's novel, *Aurore of the Yukon: A Girl's Adventure in the Klondike Gold Rush*, hit stands in June and has been enjoying speedy sales and good reviews since.

In fact, it has logged as high as 65 on Amazon.ca's bestseller list.

Halliday, along with his two best editors and illustrators

— his 10-year-old son Kieran and nine-year-old daughter Aline — penned the 134-page novel, which combines equal parts historical fact and pure entertainment.

Halliday, a fourth-generation Yukoner, plucked the ripping yarn from his family history.

It's loosely based on the real life adventures of his grandmother Aline Arbour Cyr, later Aline Taylor (of Taylor and Drury fame).

Halliday aims to present history in a way that makes children's ears perk up.

And, in *Aurore*, he's created a strong literary heroine as a role model, something he found lacking in many other children's books.

"In reading books over the years to all my kids, including my two daughters, I've found there's not too many books that have real female leaders in them," says Halliday, as he perches on the family's plush couch beside Kieran and his daughter Aline.

"Yukon women, like my mother and grandmother, were so feisty and courageous and I thought it was a real shame that kids didn't read more stories about people like them."

But it was an unhappy accident that kept Aline's mother (Halliday's great-grandmother) from hightailing it back to her Montreal home after discovering her uncle's Kirkman Creek ranch wasn't quite the mansion he'd made it out to be in his letters.

"He was always writing and saying he was the King of the Klondike and had struck it rich," says Halliday.

"He had a place at Kirkman Creek on the way down to Dawson and, of course, when they got there he didn't really have a ranch or a farm."

She tried to buy passage home for herself and her daughter Aline on the *S.S. Princess Sophia*, but she couldn't speak English very well. So they struggled with the Anglophone ticket agents and eventually secured a berth.

But just before the ship departed, she got sick and they missed the boat.

"They ended up missing the *S.S. Princess Sophia*, which ended up sinking will all hands, which turned out to be fortunate for the family," says Halliday.

"So she ended up staying in the Yukon and having a big family."

The Hallidays came up with the idea to write their family stories down while hiking the Chilkoot Trail last summer.

"I was telling the kids stories of how my grandmother made this trek without Gore-Tex and without flavoured oatmeal," says Halliday.

"And then we started talking about what that must have been like."

Of course, the family knows the tales from its adventurous roots well.

"Daddy told it to us too much," Halliday's daughter Aline adds with a straight face.

"There are so many great Yukon characters, Sam Steele, Joe Boyle..." says Halliday.

"Boyle actually ended up being a British spy in Russia during the revolution and having an affair with Queen Marie of Rumania. He rescued 200 aristocrats from the communists."

"That's quite a lark for a Yukoner." And Boyle may be a lead character in a future novel of Halliday's.

The Hallidays and the MacBride Museum are partnering to create a series of stories that bring Yukon characters and history to life for kids.

"Keith and I are both real history

aficionados, we've been talking for a long time about how we can make history come alive for kids and get them back in the museum," says MacBride Museum's executive director Patricia Cuning.

The next book will tackle the Alaska/Canada boundary dispute.

"A little bit of international intrigue," says Halliday.

*Aurore of the Yukon* will also be used as the basis of the first, in a planned series of many, kids' programs at the MacBride Museum this summer.

On July 12, the museum will host a one-day create-a-play program where kids can make their own adventures for *Aurore*.

Then from July 17 to 20, kids from ages five to 12 can take a weeklong camp where they'll learn all the skills *Aurore* learnt on her journey, like Morse Code, how to pack a hiking sack and identifying wild plant and herbs.

They'll make beans and bannock for lunch and recreate the famous Soapy Smith shootout on Main Street with a yet-to-be-named local celebrity playing the infamous Yukon gangster.

The book is geared toward eight to 10-year-old readers. It's published by iUniverse Inc., and available at Mac's Fireweed Books, the MacBride Museum and throughout the world through Amazon.com.

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