

Chronic pain isn't slowing down this writer

Positive attitude runs in the family as senior author Anne Raina works on the biography of her mother

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They say that once a book is published, the real work begins. Ottawa author Anne Raina is no slouch at getting that work done.

"I have a lot of speaking engagements with the book *Clara's Rib* and also with my children's books," said Raina, 74.

Her next speaking gig is June 11 at the Russell Public Library where she will be doing a program on two of her children's books.

Raina worked in the public and non-profit sectors, ending her career as a senior executive with a national disability organization when she herself was struck with multiple autoimmune disorders.

After the success of *Clara's Rib: A True Story of a Young Girl Growing Up in a Tuberculosis Hospital*, Raina published four children's books with illustrator Julia Taylor.

And all that despite dealing with the complications of autoimmune disorders and chronic pain. "It's always really bad," she said. "I'm in severe chronic pain 24/7. I've added to the mix severe vertigo, dizziness and vestibular migraine headaches. I can do pain, but the vertigo was a real issue to me, and I'm glad I've been able to deal with what I have."

Raina likes to do her creative writing very early in the morning. "That's my time, five or six in the morning."

Raina, who is the youngest of 10 children, has two children herself, Kelly Anne and Mark, and a stepson, Stefan.

Her father and seven of her brothers and sisters spent many years in hospital for treatment of tuberculosis in the 1930s, '40s and '50s before the days of drug therapy



Anne Raina at Maple Fest in Perth, invited by the owner of the Book Nook to display and sell her books in front of her store.

for TB. "My father died of tuberculosis when I was eight years old," she said. "My eldest brother died of the disease at age 18, and my youngest brother at age four. My sister, Clara, entered the hospital with TB in 1939 when she was 12, and she was discharged in 1952, when she had turned 26."

Through her efforts in the Ottawa area, Raina is pleased to have sold 3,500 copies of her book *Clara's Rib*.

Now she is working on a biography of her late mother Elizabeth Hepp Raina, who passed away in 1979 at the age of 79. "Of course everyone feels this about their mother, but my mom has a real history. She was born in Austro-Hungary in 1900 and went to Castor, Alberta with her family at the age of four."

Her mother was exceptional for "this remarkable memory of life in

the old country," she said. "She imbued the family with this positive attitude. She was happy, jolly and could always turn sorrow into joy."

Her mother could tell all kinds of stories of what life was like. "When they came to Castor, the west was just opening up, and their house was made of sod. She had really good recall of travelling across the west in a covered wagon, and she had to quit school in Grade 3 to look after her mother, who was ill. She became self-educated and married when she was 19. She was a very, very hard worker with an amazing facility for being joyful."

While her mother miscarried her first two children, she ended up with 10. The family moved to Quebec in 1932, and her father, who spoke six languages, and the Catholic priest were the only educated people in the community.

"They ran into this real horror of a family priest, and my eldest sister published a book about it called *We Have Written*, a true story of triumph over tragedy."

Anne would like to have her mother's biography finished a year from now. "It will be a book of inspiration, plus covering leaving the old country and the opening up of the west. My mother taught us from when we were really young, there is something beautiful in every day if you just look for it."

Anne and her husband Grant Cameron returned last fall to what is now Romania to see if her mother's house was still standing in the town of Iosifalau. "When the town was built in 1882 it was named Josefsdorf (German). When my mother and her family lived there (from 1900 to 1905), it was Yosfvllva (Hungarian).

"It was quite emotional to ac-

tually see the house where she was born," she said. "I was the only one of her children or siblings' children to have gone looking for this. What is remarkable about it is that on the little road they were on, most of the other houses were gone, but theirs was still standing. A lot of the homes in that town have fallen down."

When Raina first thought about going to Romania to search out family history, she sent an email to the library in Timisoara, a large city about 40 kilometres from the town where her mother was born.

"About a month later I received an email from a young woman who worked in the library. My email had been forwarded to her because her last name was the same as my mother's maiden name, Hepp. Julia Hepp was born about 60 kilometres from my mother. Her grandmother and my mother's parents came from the same tiny village, and so we are quite likely related. Hepp is not a common name. She offered to act as our translator if we went and was thrilled to spend three days with us searching out my family history."

Raina's self-published children's books continue to do well. "My rationale for not seeking out publishers for them yet is that I felt — at my age — I could be dead before I heard if a publisher was interested!"

In November 2015, she published *The Kangaroo with the Wooden Shoe* and *Things That Go Splat!* "I actually wrote *The Kangaroo with the Wooden Shoe* for my own children 47 years ago," she said. "They were always after me to publish them. They are actually the little characters in the books."

The response to those two books was so great that in November 2016 she published *The Kangaroo with the Wooden Shoe — Book Two* and *Things That Go Where They Shouldn't*. She's delighted that the children's books have been endorsed by teachers and have been appealing to children, teachers, parents and grandparents.

For more information about Anne's books and speaking schedule, view www.anneraina.ca.