



I slept over at the Holiday Inn Select, headquarters for this year's Blue Metropolis Literary Festival -- so I've been away from home and need to catch you up on a couple of days' worth of news! Maybe I'll start by telling you about the pics I've included in today's blog entry.

The first pic is of Cathy, one of the students from Kangirsuk, Nunavik, who was here for dinner on Thursday night (our dinner followed the launch of this year's edition of *Quebec Roots: The Place Where I Live*, which includes a chapter about Kangirsuk). The lady the student is kissing is MY MUM. My parents were out that night celebrating their 57th wedding anniversary and they popped by here afterwards to say hello to my guests from Nunavik. As you can see, my mum was, as usual, a great hit. The students were interested to learn that she had gone to school in Amsterdam with Anne Frank. At one point in the evening, I caught myself thinking *how cool is it that my mum, who is nearly 82, and survived the Holocaust, now has a chance to meet young people from Quebec's far north -- and that they get to meet her and hear her story!*

In the middle pic, which I took on Friday afternoon, you can see four of my favourite students (have you figured out yet that I have A LOT of favourites?!), Matt, Maria, Caitlyn and Sebastian, chatting with my most wonderful and talented friend author [Rina Singh](#). (Rina and I met more than 25 years ago, when we were both students at Concordia University.) Rina, who now lives in Toronto, was in Montreal for Blue Met, and she was speaking mostly about her newest book *Nearly Nonsense*. Though the book is written for youngsters aged 9 to 12, Rina's stories, which are based on Turkish tales, are funny and wise and sure to appeal to readers of all ages -- and as you can see from the pic, my students felt lucky to meet her.



In the third pic, you'll see Rina again, along with Governor General Prize winner [Kate Pullinger](#)

(author of

*The Mistress of Nothing*

), Université du Québec a Montréal literature professor Alice Van Der Klei and me. This pic was taken at the hotel last night -- Alice came over to me and introduced her friend Kate... when I heard it was THE Kate Pullinger, I dragged Rina over for the photo. And this morning, when I went to work out at the hotel gym, guess who was in the exercise room? Kate Pullinger! So, the two of us had a very pleasant chat about life and writing and curly hair! Like me, Kate, who lives in London, teaches creative writing in addition to doing her own writing. She's also an expert on e-books and new technologies, and was doing a workshop on that at Blue Met this morning.

Rina and I took a children's writing workshop with British author [Anne Fine](#) . It's a two-day workshop and so far, to be honest, I haven't learned much that is new to me. On the other hand, Anne has confirmed certain things I already feel such as that a writer needs to write regularly, not only when she (or he) feels like it. Anne doesn't like the inclusion of dreams in literature -- I'm not sure I agree with her there! She's also down on the present tense, which I happen to like. But I'm interested in Anne's position -- she pointed out that there are 12 tenses in the English language and that we should use them!

This afternoon, my husband and I went to hear Egyptian writer [Alaa Al Aswany](#) . He was amazing and inspiring and oh-so-smart. Al Aswany spoke as much about Egyptian politics as he did about his own writing process. I took loads of notes, but I thought I'd include something in today's blog entry about how he gets to know his characters: "I make files for my characters. I put in every detail. The way he looks. Does he smoke? What kind of cigarettes? At some point, I feel my characters have become true and then I begin writing. At some point, the character will become independent. I see on the screen of my imagination what I see him doing." See what I mean about INSPIRING?

If I'm not too tuckered out by the end of the day tomorrow, I'll be back with another report from Blue Metropolis. If you're one of my students this semester, I look forward to hearing what event you attended and what you learned. Hopefully, you guys got inspired too!