

Toronto-born author coming to Caledon to discuss new war book

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Toronto born Ted Barris found his love for history while in grade school, after writing a paper on the War of 1812.

Barris began his writing career 50 years ago. He started out as a journalist and broadcaster, freelancing for news corporations such as CBC, CTV, The Globe and Mail, The National Post, to name a few, before, eventually, finding his niche as an author. As of today, he has written and published 19 historical novels.

'I'm one of those people who can't keep a steady job. I'm everywhere and all over the place. The term used to be freelancer, today it's precarious work,' says Barris. 'I've been fortunate because there's always been plenty of work.'

His interest for historical writing began when he was in fifth grade and was assigned to write a research paper on the War of 1812. With the inspiration from his teacher, his journey back in time got underway.

'I was fascinated with history probably because of a grade five teacher who turned me onto the subject and made it come to life,' explains Barris. 'I realized there was lots more there than dates and facts and horrible textbooks. So, I decided to write some of my own.'

Barris began researching, interviewing and writing his first book, 'First Canoe: Prairie Steamboat Days Revisited', which would be published in 1977. The book became a huge hit, especially in western Canada.

According to Barris' website, he 'gained additional attention when the federal government decided to recognize western Canada steamers with a series of commemorative postage stamps.'

While continuing his freelance work, Barris went on to write more historical books on various different parts of history; not just focusing on the military. Some of these include Rodeo Cowboys, The Last Heroes, Playing Overtime, A Celebration of Oldtimers' Hockey, Carved in Granite, 125 Years of Granite Club History.

He also completed several military pieces, including Deadlock in Korea, Canadians at War 1950-1953 and Breaking the Silence: Veterans' Untold Stories from the Great War of Afghanistan, just to name a few.

Barris has received several book awards and civic accomplishments for his work including the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs for Canada awarded Barris the commendation, which is an award presented to those who have contributed to the well-being of veterans, or who have dedicated themselves to helping the remembrance to those who have fought in armed conflict in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ted Barris will be coming to Caledon on Dec 3 to speak to the community about his latest book, Rush to Danger which is written about the men and women medics in the military dating back to the first Civil War in 1862, all the way to the wars in Afghanistan.

'I can remember this book began almost exactly 56 years ago, when I was 14. My dad was at that time doing some freelance work and working at home, I was laid up after an accident and he was sort of amusing me with stories, as he often did, and I asked him 'what did you do in the war?' and he told me that he was a medic,' explains Barris. 'And a lot of people would be familiar with the name Alex Barris. He was a very well known newspaper writer, television host, broadcaster, journalist, author - he wrote 10 books himself. Dad was born in the United States, so his experience in the Second World War was as a medic in the American army.'

Barris's father told him all of the funny stuff he remembered from his time in the war, not ready to explain the harsh realities to 14-year-old Ted.

?My dad's story is a powerful one, but it's not the whole book. It's kind of like the spine to the book. I come back to his story at the beginning at each of the 10 chapters, but the majority of the book is an exploration of what it's like or has been like for nurses and surgeons, stretch bearers, ambulance drivers, military dentists, orderlies; all the military medical jobs, that you never see or hear about.?

He added, ?I go all the way to the present time, to men and women who are medics, modern medics in the military serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, highlighting some of the extraordinary experiences they have had, saving lives in the back of Blackhawk helicopters that are medevacking their patients out.?

To learn more about Ted Barris and his books, please visit tedbarris.com, or come listen to his presentation at the Bolton Mills Retirement Centre on Dec 3 at 7 p.m.