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This little writer's bloc has me green with envy

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CHRISTIAN AAGAARD
RECORD STAFF

Their names are mills, Langan and Schnurr, not Atwood, Berton or Shields.

And they're crowding my turf.

I'm talking about people who write for a hobby, people who are perfectly happy with the lack of widespread fame and fortune that writing might bring.

That's puzzling to this professional columnist, who harbours dreams of one day mooning the managing editor and walking off the job to the comfort of a big fat cash advance for writing the great Canadian novel.

My own writer's fantasy (not shared, oddly enough, by the woman in my life) includes dishevelled hair, the Bay of Fundy, a storm-worn, two-storey house and a second-floor room littered with unpaired shoes, crumpled paper and a smashed coffee cup -- the shrapnel of explosive writer's rage.

This is what separates professionals from the hobby writer. The professional looks for the meal ticket, the glory.

The mills, Langans and Schnurrs of the world write simply because it's a itch they've got to scratch.

"I just find capturing things and presenting them in a living way -- in the sense that a book can be flipped through over and over -- is a good thing," said Paul Langan of Cambridge.

Writing for sheer pleasure, he has cranked out five short, photo-rich books on local historical topics.

His latest, *Forgotten Stories of the Railway*, recalls newsworthy events on the rails that cut through Cambridge's Hespeler, Preston and Galt communities.

"I can put in \$3,000 and nothing of it comes back," Langan said. "But a lot of people put \$3,000 into their hobbies."

Kitchener resident rych mills, (he spells his name in lower case) just released his second book.

A few years ago, he wrote a history of Victoria Park. Now he's written Kitchener (Berlin) 1880-1960 for the Images of Canada series by Arcadia Publishing of Charleston, South Carolina.

A veteran sifter of old news clippings, photographs and musty letters, mills says there is one sentence he dreads the most: "That was thrown out when Grandmother died two years ago."

There are plenty of others on the local list of people who write because they darn well want to, never mind the money.

Among them are Julie Schnurr, whose book, More Than A Pool in the Woods, looks at the village of Linwood. Murray and Daina Feick of Kitchener wrote Thanks Dad! to show people how to put up a back yard skating rink.

This fall, Elmira resident Doug Thomas published The Bloody Boy, a historical novel set in the War of 1812. He used a new tool to do it.

Book Express at the Cambridge Centre has InstaBook publishing, by which sane folk living away from the inspiration of Atlantic gales can publish a book that actually looks like a book.

The expectation was that people would use InstaBook to download and run off the odd copy of some out-of-date or hard-to-find publication.

Instead, it's bringing out hobby writers clutching computer disks. They may not want more than a dozen copies of their great works.

"It's a better way to do your family history, say, than stacking the basement with a thousand books," said Book Express owner John Cheyne.

Books by local writers, he said, are steadily gaining shelf space in bookstores.

I'm feeling a tad envious.

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