

NEIGHBOURS OF FEBRUARY 2024
Albert St. South

**AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR LOVES
HER NEIGHBOURHOOD**

GLOBE-TROTTING TEACHER, MUSICIAN AND AUTHOR
TRAVELS THE WORLD FOR INSPIRATION.

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AN EXCLUSIVE MAGAZINE SERVING THE RESIDENTS OF SOUTH ALBERT PARK, ALBERT PARK, PARLIAMENT PLACE AND WHITMORE PARK

AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR LOVES HER NEIGHBOURHOOD

By Shawna Common • Photos by Parry Johnson Photography and submitted by Alison Lohans



Alison Lohans has called Whitmore Park home since 1988. She came a long way before she settled in the quiet community.

She grew up in Reedley, California. It was a small agricultural community in central California.

She began making up stories when she was five years old.

Laura Ingalls Wilder was her biggest influence when she was a child. She wanted to be a writer just like Laura. She envied the historical figure's ability to see the horizon on the prairie. Alison was raised in an area that was mostly orchards and mountains, so she couldn't see the horizon like Laura described in her books.

Her parents, Walt and Mildred, were very encouraging. When she turned seven years old, her parents decided she was old enough to start banging out her stories on her dad's typewriter.

She began submitting her stories for publication when she was 10. She quickly discovered the writer's bane: rejections.

She was 13 when she had a short story published for the first time, and she had another story published the following year.

She dreamed of being a writer, but she also knew that it was next to impossible to make a living as an author. She decided to pursue a career in her other passion which is music.

She had started taking piano lessons at the age of five and she was able to read simple music before she could read words. She decided to become a band teacher.

She started her post-secondary career at Wittier College, then earned her Bachelor of Arts at California State University, Los Angeles.

She was raised as a Quaker and therefore was a pacifist. Her town consisted mainly of conservative and right-wing folks, and she often felt out of place there.

When the United States became involved in the Vietnam War, she participated in peace vigils with her father and sympathized with her young counterparts who were being drafted into the military. Many of the people she knew moved to Canada during this time.

She encouraged her late husband to apply to Canadian universities while he was looking for a school to work on his Ph.D. in psychology. The best offer came from the University of Victoria, so they became landed immigrants in 1971.

Alison immediately felt at home in Canada and eventually obtained her Canadian citizenship.

She obtained her post-graduate diploma in Elementary Education at the University of Victoria in 1976. Later that year her husband landed a job at the University of Regina, where he taught until he lost his battle with cancer in 1985.

Alison arrived in Regina and hit the ground running. She joined the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild and started teaching beginning band at Regina Public Schools until the end of the 1970s. She joined small, informal recorder ensembles and taught a small seniors' weekly recorder group.

She stopped teaching and became a stay-at-home mom when she started having her children. She found she was able to devote more time to writing in her new role.

"Regina is where my writing truly took root and began bearing fruit. I could see the horizon here!" she said.

By 1980 she had started publishing short stories in children's magazines and also published an original song in a Canadian music textbook. Her first young adult novel *Who Cares About Karen?* was published by Scholastic Canada in 1983. She began publishing other children's and young adult books.

Her 31st book, *The Wind & Amanda's Cello* will be released by Shadowpaw Press in the autumn of 2024. She has published books with large Canadian presses and small Saskatchewan presses. She also published seven books with Pearson Education New Zealand which was later bought by Pearson Education Australia.

She has won the Saskatchewan Book Award for Young Adult Literature and has been short-listed for provincial, national and international awards. She was named the Regina YWCA 2012 Jacquie Schumiacher Woman of Distinction for her contributions to the arts.

"I was deeply honoured to serve as Writer-in-Residence at the Regina Public Library from 2002 to 2003. Another aspect of writing that I truly love is the opportunities to visit schools and libraries to talk about writing and share my work. I have done over 1,000 readings across Canada. I've taught writing, mentored several successful, award-winning authors, and I also do some editing," explained Alison.

She has participated in many more activities and organizations throughout the years. She started playing the cornet with the Queen City Brass Band in 2004, she has played trumpet and cello on and off with the University of Regina Orchestra since the 1990s. She played in the



Regina Conservatory of Performing Arts adult cello choir, then played with the "Juliets" when the first group disbanded. She has played a variety of instruments and sang with various groups over the years.

She has served on volunteer boards such as the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, the Writers' Union of Canada, the Canadian Children's Book Centre, the Queen City Brass Band, Concertino Regina, Regina Music Club, the Lakeview United Church and the South Saskatchewan Youth Orchestra. She has also served on several Quaker boards and she is currently involved in a national Quaker editing project.

Alison has a passion for travel. She said that she gets story ideas from experiencing far-flung destinations and areas closer to home. *Strong as a Pharaoh* (2022) was inspired by her trip to Egypt, *Dog Alert* (2011) was the result of her tour of northern Saskatchewan, and *Doppelganger* (2010) was the result of her visit to Greece and Turkiye.

She has always enjoyed returning home to her peaceful neighbourhood with good neighbours. She feels safe there and loves the mature trees, birds, and other wildlife.

"I have to say that Whitmore Park was a wonderful place to raise my children. When we first moved to the area in 1988, it was heartwarming to see so many neighbourhood children playing together outside year-round. I have always been grateful for the opportunities that were available for my children to participate in activities both in our neighbourhood and in the city," she said.

Some of the activities were soccer, skating, Scouts, and the South Saskatchewan Youth Orchestra.

Her boys are grown now. John is in his mid-40s and lives in northern Saskatchewan. Chris is in his mid-30s and is a professor of biochemistry and microbiology at Queen's University in Ontario while his partner, Che, is a professor of virology there.

Alison has some animals for companionship. Sebastian is a 14-year-old Shih Tzu cross and Sassy is a six-year-old mini-schnauzer. She also has two budgie birds.

"There are some really good people in Whitmore Park and some of them are extremely helpful with necessary tasks of property ownership. I've had the genuine privilege of getting to know some of the teenagers who have enjoyed having jobs walking my dogs and doing the occasional housesitting. I also really like that our peaceful neighbourhood has such easy access to shopping, banking, dining, and the George Bothwell Public Library," said Alison.