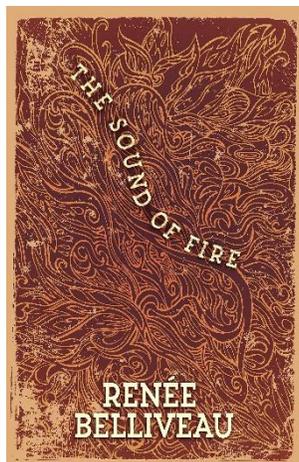


MARY CAMPBELL READS BOOKS

THE SOUND OF FIRE

by Renee Belliveau     



I was born and raised in Sackville, NB, the home of Mount Allison University. My parents were married in June of 1941. She was a young nurse who met my father in Amherst, NS where she had received her training. He was a 4th or 5th-generation Sackville native. Within 6 months of their marriage, Pearl Harbour was bombed, and then came the basis of this book, *The Sound of Fire* by **Renee Belliveau**, a New Brunswicker herself.

My mother was not afraid of much, but two things I remember her fearing were dogs (she had been bitten as a child), and we always had dogs, but she coped, and fires, which I later came to understand the reason for, again, the reason for this book. Oh, how I wish I had paid closer attention to her stories

from that time. She was actively involved in treating some of the victims.

Just before Christmas break at Mount Allison, in 1941, a massive, devastating fire broke out shortly after midnight in the men's residence on campus. The building was destroyed in short order, resulting in a number of injuries from burns and jumps; even more devastating were the deaths of four young men who could not make it out.

As stated, the book is based on the actual incident, but real names are not included in the story. It is of interest that world-renowned painter Alex Colville and his girlfriend/wife Rhoda, were a part of this horrendous incident, Alex being a senior at the time.

The author of the book is a fairly recent graduate of Mount A, and now works there. She became intrigued by the incident, and began extensive, intensive research which included a lot of time in the archives plus interviews with survivors and/or family members (not so many after all this time). The result is this little gem of a book - her first which, while based on fact, is full of imagined but quite believable details.

Belliveau decided to tell the story from various points of view - students in the building as well as the ladies' residence, different townsfolk and dignitaries such as the university's president, and some instructors, etc. So there are a lot of 'characters'. What really impressed me though, was her making the fire itself into a character. As fire is to many, it was mesmerizing at times. It had a voice; it had a mission. It had . . . feelings?

Most of the campus has undergone much change since then, but I have memories of some parts - especially the old gymnasium which was a gathering place for survivors at the time.

The book moves along at a fairly rapid pace, as a fire would. Some say it only took about 15 minutes for the building to be razed. I do not believe it will ever be forgotten and am grateful that Renee was able to capture it the way she did. There is a plaque now on campus with the names of those who died to help ensure they and the entire tragedy will remain.

Sackville native or not, Mount Allisonian or not, NB'er, Canadian - it doesn't matter where you're from, this is a book that begs to be read. It's that good.

