

## arts &amp; culture

# Urban legends

*Dear Peggy* is a collection of contemporary Winnipeg folklore from storyteller hannah\_g

## art preview

HANNAH\_G: *DEAR PEGGY*

Feb. 23, 7:30 p.m.

Dalnavert Museum

Marlo Campbell

“Everyone likes being told stories about themselves,” says local multi-disciplinary artist-turned storyteller hannah\_g.

She’s right, of course — but her statement may ring especially true for those who call this particular city home. In Winnipeg, an isolated Prairie town where everyone knows everyone else’s business and gossip spreads faster than you can say Burton Cummings, self-mythologizing comes as natural as frostbite (see: Guy Maddin’s dreamy pseudo-documentary *My Winnipeg*, which had at least a few American film critics scratching their heads over implausible legends of frozen horses and Nazi invasions, some true, some less so).

On Thursday, Feb. 23, at Dalnavert Museum, hannah\_g will be sharing some Winnipeg mythology of her own with the launch of *Dear Peggy*, a contemporary folklore project she’s been working on for the past three years. (Admission is \$10 and space is limited; reservations can be made by calling 943-2835 or email-

ing bookings@mhs.mb.ca.)

The event will feature a storytelling performance, and those who attend will also have the opportunity to purchase cassette tapes featuring seven of hannah\_g’s stories and copies of a limited-edition artist’s book.

“It’s not like a conventional storybook. It’s an accordion-fold book and each page contains an element from a story that I’m telling,” hannah\_g explains.

“It’s like a strange kind of map,” she continues. “The only way to find your way into the book is to listen to the stories — and it’s the same with the city. The city’s quite a hard city; it’s very much a secret city. But when you know some of the stories, then parts of the landscape start making sense to you.”

Originally from England, hannah\_g, who’s now in her mid-30s, moved to Winnipeg in 2008 after scoring her dream job as the program co-ordinator at acertinc., a non-profit artist-run centre on McDermot Avenue. Though she had previously spent six months working in Toronto, she didn’t know a single person here; in fact, she had never even heard of Winnipeg prior to accepting the job.

Like all newcomers, hannah\_g soon discovered the uncanny interconnection shared by Winnipeggers — call it one degree of separation instead of six — and the mutable variations of civic history passed down from one generation to another as a result.



hannah\_g

“(Folklore) is usually transmitted orally between people, and that’s a lot of what I was introduced to in Winnipeg when I first arrived here,” hannah\_g says.

“Those multiple connections that people have with each other mean that everyone’s got a story about that one person’s story.”

Sometimes quirky, sometimes sad, the stories that make up *Dear Peggy* are filled with nods to the familiar: the Paddlewheel Restaurant, frozen rivers, the cemetery in North Point Douglas. Instantly recognizable to any local, little details help imbue the tales with a strong sense of authenticity, whether such a thing is deserved or not.

Like all good storytellers, hannah\_g prefers to remain deliberately ambiguous about that aspect of her work.

Besides, whether Winnipeggers really flick two pennies into the water when they cross the Redwood Bridge isn’t the point of *Dear Penny*. True or not, hannah\_g says her stories are about capturing the spirit of a city she has come to love.

“I’m really just trying to communicate the feeling I get from Winnipeg,” she says. “The possibilities and the things which I think probably could happen here — and that people want to believe.”

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