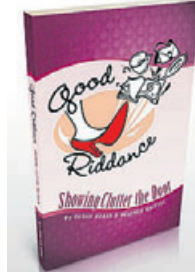


## BOOKS

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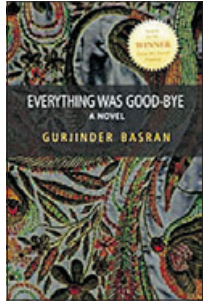
## SHOWING CLUTTER THE DOOR

Is your New Year's resolution to clear out junk from your cupboards and closets? **Susan Borax** and **Heather Knittel**, who run a Vancouver-based organizing business, have written *Good Riddance: Showing Clutter the Door*. It's a practical how-to guide about ridding your life of CRUD: Completely Ridiculous Useless Debris. They've included 101 household clutter items that they say they find in nearly every home they organize. Included here are tips on how to clear out your junk drawers, your baseball hat collection and all those out-of-order appliances.

## FICTION

## Torn between two cultures

Gurjinder Basran takes a fascinating look at realities of growing up Indo-Canadian in North Delta



## EVERYTHING WAS GOOD-BYE

By Gurjinder Basran

Mother Tongue Publishing, 256 pages, \$21.95

BY TRACY SHERLOCK  
VANCOUVER SUN

**G**urjinder Basran knows what it's like to be stuck between two cultures and not feel like part of either one. The first-time novelist writes about her experience growing up as an Indo-Canadian in North Delta in her award-winning novel *Everything Was Good-bye*. The book's main character, Meena, bears some similarity to Basran, but the novel is a work of fiction.

"We have very similar upbringings, Meena and I. I'm the youngest of six daughters, like Meena, and my father died in a similar way to hers," Basran said. "However, outside of that it's really quite fictional. The part that feels very true to me is the duality, you know living between two cultures and not really fitting, or having a sense of freedom or sense of choice in either of them."

*Everything Was Good-bye* begins when Meena is in high school, and she's feeling a bit rebellious. Her closest friend is Liam, a Canadian boy with an artistic flair who comes from a troubled home. The friendship causes tension between Meena and her mother, but that ends when Liam leaves town.

"Living in two worlds is difficult. You were trying to fit into a world that really wasn't that interested in you, and yet, you really liked the independence, and pop culture and other aspects of that culture, so you really wanted to be part of that scene," Basran said of her own experience.

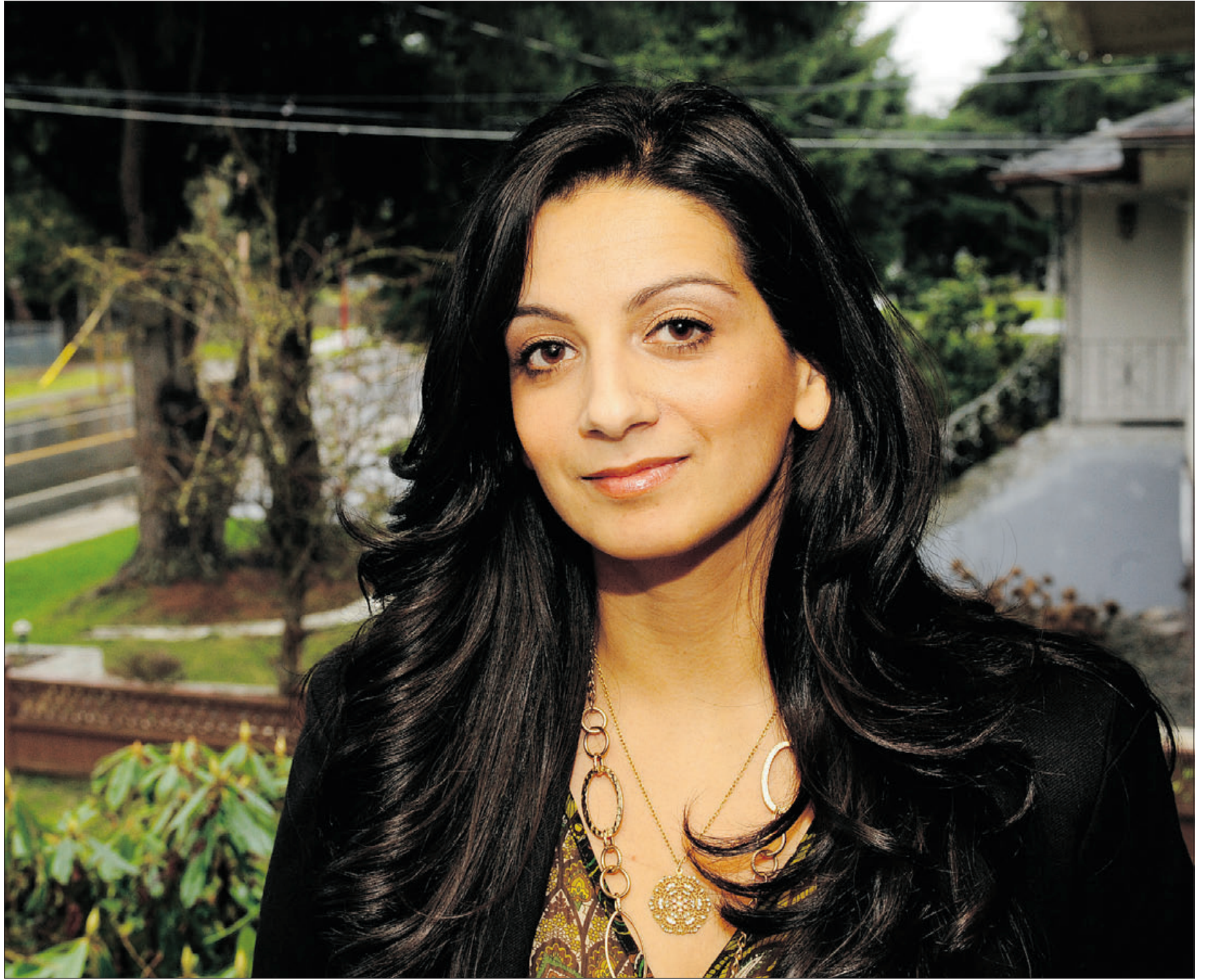
"At home, many of us were faced with parents who were working extremely hard, as many immigrant families do, so they feel not only a disconnect from their parents, but culturally there really isn't enough time for parents to impart the values of that culture, so it seems almost superfluous.

"You just don't know who you are and you just don't know what you need to do to be accepted."

This exceptional novel explores this duality in realistic terms. Basran's writing is clean, and her story is fascinating.

"I think Meena gets a bit of a bad rap that she's quite harsh and angry, but I think it's important for the reader to know that her anger just stems from so many small agonies and so many small injustices," Basran said. "I think she's a good lesson for us all because generally when people are hurt we all lash out in anger. She's really interesting because she appears to be so angry and a self-hating person, but really, she's just quite wounded."

In the next chapter of the book, Meena is a few years older and is



GLENN BAGLO/PNG

North Delta writer Gurjinder Basran explores the issues facing young Indo-Canadians in *Everything Was Good-bye*.

being pressured to get married. Her mother arranges a marriage to Sunny, a boy who is the pampered only son of immigrant parents, but who fits the criteria for an arranged marriage.

This is where Meena and Basran's lives take different paths. Although Basran is married to someone from her own culture, theirs was a "love" marriage.

"I met my husband when I was in college. He is Indian, and he is Sikh, but he's from a different part of India, so a different caste," Basran said. "There's all these levels of sameness and differences within our culture."

"Though my mother wasn't thrilled with my love marriage, as it was not common at the time, she did accept it and as such my husband and I had a traditional wedding."

The relationship between Meena and her mother is central to *Everything Was Good-bye*, and the pain that goes along with their love is tender and raw.

"She loves her daughter like nothing else, and yet, she's very aware of

needing society's approval," Basran said. "Everyone in this novel is just so stuck within who they want to be and who they believe they should be."

"You have the same thing with Meena's husband Sunny. He is also stuck with his parental expectations, and what they expect of him even as a son. And you see the same thing with Liam, he craves freedom, but what he actually needs is attachments. Everyone is stuck with the things that they want versus the things that they should want."

Basran said love marriages are much more common today in her culture, and are no longer frowned upon.

"There was a lot of stigma associated at that time when people found out that it was a love marriage. That brings out notions that these people have been together in some way, or they've been dating," Basran said.

Basran, 38, was married in 1992 and still lives in North Delta with her husband, and is mother to two sons, aged 12 and eight. She says her sons likely won't face the same feelings of duality

she did, because multiculturalism is a reality now and not just an idea.

"Everything is celebrated in school, and you can go to the bank and speak your native language," Basran said, adding that today it is easier to assimilate a western and an Indian culture.

"It is the assimilation of identities into something whole, that is very different than the duality I faced. So many people fear that assimilation means that cultural heritages are lost, but in fact they need not be lost, or diluted, they are simply combined and integrated with other value systems that actually in turn enhance the community by broadening the scope of understanding."

Basran completed the Simon Fraser University creative writing program in 2006 and was named "One to Watch" by *The Vancouver Sun* in 2008. *Everything Was Good-bye* was a top 100 finisher in the 2006 Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award (as a manuscript) and won the 2010 Search for the Great B.C. Novel Contest.

Basran said publication has brought

much validation to her process of writing this novel, and that reaction has been largely positive.

"A lot of the feedback while I was writing the novel was, is this worth it, what is this for and are you sure you want to open yourself up to possible criticism from even within the Indo-Canadian community?" Basran said. "As of late, feedback has been quite positive from all, especially my family, which has been a surprise to me."

Despite the fact that multiculturalism is no longer just an idea, there are still not many authors writing about the Indo-Canadian experience.

"I've been looking for more of these voices, and I'm not finding many of them, which is concerning," Basran said. "As a writer, I don't want to be representative of anything. I'm a writer, not a politician."

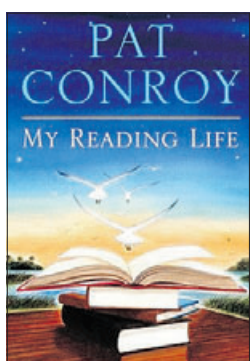
"There's so many ways to be Indo-Canadian, this is just one experience."

Sun Books Editor  
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## NON-FICTION

## Pat Conroy finds joy in new memoir

Instead of the usual suicides and craziness, the South Carolina author looks at family stories that gave him joy



## MY READING LIFE

by Pat Conroy

Nan A. Talese, 352 pages, \$28.95

BY JOY TIPPING

**N**ovels such as *The Great Santini*, *The Prince of Tides* and *South of Broad* have made Pat Conroy one of the most beloved Southern authors of this or the last century. While readers have relished his work, he didn't

have much fun writing it, at least until now.

"I've never enjoyed writing a book — usually in my books people commit suicide, go nuts, are sad beyond human belief. . . . But with this book," he says, referring to his new memoir, *My Reading Life*, "I finally got to include stories of my family that bring me great joy."

Conroy talked with us by phone from his home on Fripp Island, near Beaufort, S.C.

**Q.** You write about your adoration of the novel *Gone With the Wind*. Any flak for that?

**A.** Oh yeah, I've been catching hell. A guy on the radio chastised me for it, he hates the book. He said, "Frankly, the people where I came from are glad we lost that war." He thinks that somehow because I love that book, I'm all for slavery. Stupidity.

**Q.** Your mom, Peg, introduced you to "GWTW," right?

**A.** She read it to me out loud, every year from the time I was 5, and we watched the movie every time it was on.

**Q.** You were at one time going to write the sequel. What happened to that?

**A.** The (Margaret Mitchell) estate contacted me about it, and I had a great idea, I thought, which was to write the autobiography of Rhett Butler, and of course I'd dedicate it to my mother. . . . But the estate kept handing down these edicts; I couldn't write about miscegenation, or homosexuality.

I got so fed up, I told them the first line of the book would be, "After Rhett Butler made love to Ashley, he lit a cigarette, handed it to Ashley, and asked, 'Have I ever told you my

grandmother was black?'" That didn't work out.

**Q.** You give great credit to teachers in general and especially to your high school English teacher, Gene Norris. Tell us about him.

**A.** Oh, that guy was so sweet. He set me up, when I was 15, to meet the poet laureate of South Carolina. . . . That had a huge impact on my life. He never let me forget it.

I had to pay it back by talking to kids who want to be writers. (laughing) I've talked to every (expletive) high school student in this state.

**Q.** Are any of your four grown daughters writers?

**A.** My daughter Melissa wrote a children's book called *Poppy's Pants*, which mocks me for only wearing khaki pants. She and the others used to go to my closet and see the lines of khaki pants and think, "Dad must be a

very poor man." There's a Poppy doll. If I really looked like that, I'd stick my head in an oven.

**Q.** What's next up for you?

**A.** I'm in the middle of *The Death of Santini*, which is about how my father changed late in his life.

I'm learning some stunning things that explain a lot about my family, and my mom's and dad's families — I mean, my mom and dad were like Zeus and Hera, it was crazy. It's almost turning into an autobiography. It's due March 1, so it should be out next fall.

**Q.** Readers seem to think all of your books are autobiography.

**A.** Yeah, they think it's all true, including my wife. When she married me, she asked me if I'd ever thought about writing fiction.

McClatchy Newspapers