

# Ailing son, 11, provides inspiration for Niagara poet

By CHRISTOPHER WATERS  
Standard Staff

Jim Slominski's day starts at 4:30 a.m. with his morning ritual, a stolen sedom of yoga, t'ai chi, meditation and writing poetry.

For a brief window at the crack of dawn, the Niagara-on-the-Lake resident is more than a husband and father of two small children, more than a nurseryman. Alone with his thoughts, he's an author.

"I don't just write poetry at that time," said Slominski, who has been chosen as a finalist in the CBC Literary Awards for two consecutive years for poems inspired by his son Jake.

"I'll play with different combinations of those activities but I do treat writing in the same way, as part of my actual space. I approach it somewhat meditatively. It's not a meditation in itself, but it is approached with the same sort of openness."

His winning entry will be featured on CBC Radio One April 1 at 2:30 a.m. on *Between the Covers* during Richardson's Roundup and again at 10:40 p.m.

The 40-year-old native of Montreal will also be the featured author at World of



Jim Slominski's poetry can be heard on CBC Radio One on April 1 and at the World of Words Passport Reading Series in St. Catharines on April 4.

staff photo by Leonard LePage

Worlds Passport Reading Series April 4 at 7:30 p.m. at the Old Courthouse Theatre in downtown St. Catharines.

Slominski's 11-year-old son Jake was diagnosed with Duchennes muscular dystrophy (sufferers will lose the ability to walk, the ability to perform

most tasks and have a life expectancy far shorter than normal).

"It's not a good thing to have," he said, his voice trailing off.

In his poetry, Slominski is more verbose. An ongoing series of poems offer slice-of-life vignettes about how Jake makes his way through the world told from the perspective of a loving father whose spirits soar and crash with each small victory and cruel setback.

Writing about a play-day, where the contrast of physical ability between Jake and other kids his age was impossible to overlook, Slominski offers the following: "*My boy's body/moves like a marionette/made of bricks. No one listens/as ears move too fast/and away. His words/fall against the Plexiglas around him.*"

The "Jake poems," as Slominski calls them, are just one of four themes which emerge during those early morning sessions. Other poetic threads involve other family matters, nature poems and more spiritual musings. ("They are odd poems," he explains of the last lot. "I'm not sure where these came from.")

The four concerns are featured in

his first book, *The Wind Is a Tall Man Striding*, which was published in 2000 by Watershed Books, and carry on to a new manuscript making the rounds with publishers across the country.

"I sense I'm doing different things with that same material," he said. "I imagine I might come to the point where I've exhausted the possibilities or repeated myself so often that I'll just let it drop."

At next week's reading, Slominski will focus on the CBC Award poems, which will be presented with new poems from the manuscript and some selections from his first book. The award poems have also been collected into *The Light Load*, a pamphlet which will be on sale that night.

Slominski's poetry reads like a voyage of discovery about the natural world or human relationships. Big questions answered in baby steps.

"I'm often just as surprised by what shows up on the page as everyone else," he said. "I used to write poetry that was somewhat figured out in my head before it showed up to the page."

"In the last five years, I've discovered an entirely different way of approaching it. I'm much fresher to the

page. I have a little more confidence in my ability to pull out the poems that are stored in my body.

"If something strikes me out there in the world, I won't feel as panicked about getting that down on the page right away. I'll let it stay in my body — it might stay a couple of weeks — then, all of a sudden, one morning it just starts to fill in on the page."

The main point of poetry, he said, is to communicate. His own poetry seeks to communicate in an imaginative way which blurs fiction and reality.

"There's something about the kind of musicality that comes out in condensing an experience (in poetry). There's a lot more playfulness just in word choices and the kind of jarring of the senses. I like reading and writing poetry. It's my chosen craft."

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**WHAT:** The World of Words Passport Reading Series presents Jim Slominski

**WHERE:** Old Courthouse, 101 King St., Second Floor, St. Catharines

**WHEN:** April 4 at 7:30 p.m.; Admission \$4 members, \$5 general admission

**CALL:** 905-684-3737