



CHRISTINE KOZAK

# *A Passion for Pysanky*

## Reflections on the Art of Writing Pysanky from Coast to Coast

The warm glow of a candle flame, the lingering scent of beeswax, the sound of spoons clinking against the sides of glass jars. Writing pysanky is a feast for the senses, and a delight to be shared as we prepare for Easter celebrations.

No two pysankas are alike – and each one is a reflection of the artistry and passion of the individual who created it. Writing pysanky is a tradition rooted in our ancestral beliefs and it continues to define and unite our Ukrainian community.

The pysanka holds great power in the world. Legend tells us that in a faraway land, there is a very large and evil monster chained to a cliff. This monster has servants who travel throughout the world taking stock of how many pysanky have been made for Easter. In the years that fewer eggs have been decorated, the monster's chains are loosened and more evil is unleashed in the world. If ever there are no pysanky made, the evil one would be released and he would destroy the world. But, in years that many pysanky are made, the monster's chains are held tight. In the years of bountiful pysanka-writing, the pysanka's power of love and goodness is felt throughout all nations, bringing peace and harmony to all.

Writing pysanky is an art that can capture your heart at any age, no matter where you are. Here are a few reflections of some very talented pysanka writers from across Canada:

# Joan Brander

BC

I learned the tradition of pysanky as a very young child from my baba in the late 1950s. I remember with fondness the scent of melting beeswax on her big wood stove where she baked bread and the kitchen table where we worked.

Creating pysanky connects me to my heritage in a calm, peaceful ritual, while at the same time creating excitement as the magic of colour and design is revealed at the end of the process. The feel of the egg, the therapeutic repetition of pattern, the scent of melted beeswax, and the ambiance of candle light not only brings me to reflect on their significance and meaning, but also evokes a sense of pride in my Ukrainian ancestry. Writing pysanky gives me the most joy when I am sharing my knowledge with others.

Favourite moments that come to mind readily all involve my teaching pysanky to children – the time a little boy wrote me a note saying “this has been the best day of my life.” Another time when I had an indescribable connection with a small child (about 3 years old) who knew no English and who could not understand me, but when I guided her hand to write on an egg, her interest, attention, and expression needed no words. And the time a whole class erupted in spontaneous applause at seeing what was hiding beneath the beeswax. And there have been comical moments, too – when a little boy frantically cried out, “I don’t want my egg to vanish” when I was explaining that I would put some varnish on his pysanka to protect it!

