

# Two Lives Crossing

A Novel about the 1st Battalion, 48th Highlanders of Canada during World War

By Robert MacBain

*Editor's note: Scottish-born Toronto author Robert MacBain's first novel, which is now available as a paperback at Amazon.ca and ChaptersIndigo.ca can also be ordered at any Chapters, Indigo or Coles bookstore. An eBook edition is available in 70 countries around the world on Kobo.*

On the Acknowledgement page at the end of his big novel, MacBain says:

"The author acknowledges, with grateful appreciation, the factual information about the 48th Highlanders of Canada which he derived from reading *The Spirit of the Regiment* by Jack Batten and Family of Volunteers which was written by George W. (Geordie) Beal who served the Regiment as a Major and as an Honorary Colonel.

"The author is particularly indebted to HCol. Beal for taking the time to check over the information about the 48th Highlanders in *Two Lives Crossing* and for allowing him the privilege of reading some of the letters his dad wrote to his mom from Italy and Holland. Some of that information and perspective made its way into the letters Tom wrote to Martha."

*Two Lives Crossing* tells the story of the sons of a Scottish immigrant and a Blackfoot cook who are separated after their mother dies giving birth to the second son at a ranch near Calgary in May, 1939. The father is killed less than three years later defending the British Crown colony of Hong Kong. His brother serves with the 48th in England, Sicily, Italy and Holland and survives the war.

One of the dead brother's sons is raised as a Blackfoot at an Indian reserve southwest of Calgary. The other is raised white by the surviving brother in a middle-class neighborhood in Toronto.

Bill Eagletail is taken to sweat lodges, sun dances, rodeos and pow wows. He is the first Indian to graduate from the University of Alberta, has a doctorate in Sociology from Berkeley, and is the Director of the North American Indian Studies program at the University of Toronto.

Gordon MacArthur is raised white in Toronto, regaled with stories about King Robert the Bruce and Bonnie Prince Charlie, and taken to the Highland games and other places where Scottish-Canadians celebrate their shared heritage. He is a professor of political science at the U of T and will

be the Conservative candidate in the 1974 federal election.

When the brothers get into a verbal spat on a live Toronto TV show, neither of them knows that they are adopted or that they are brothers. They soon find out and their lives are changed dramatically.

Robert MacBain was born in Inverness, Scotland, in 1937 and moved to Toronto with his single mum in 1947. You can read more about him and his book on [www.robertmacbainbooks.ca](http://www.robertmacbainbooks.ca)

MacBain lives in the Upper Beach area of Toronto with his wife of 30 years – former International Cooperation Minister Maria Minna.

## Excerpt from *Two Lives Crossing*

MacBain's novel contains several letters Tom MacArthur wrote to his wife Martha during the war. Below is a shortened version of one she received on September 2, 1943:

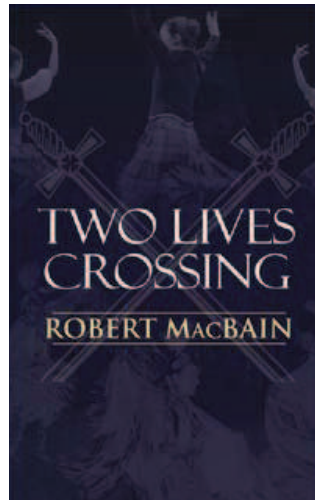
*My dearest darling Martha,*

*Please forgive me for the delay in writing to you. Since landing on the beach at Pachino on the southern tip of Sicily on July ninth, it's been a month of sheer hell. If I could've written sooner, my love, I would have.*

*About 700 of us from the 48th left Scotland at the end of June along with about 2,000 soldiers from other regiments. We were on a troop ship called HMT Derbyshire and had no idea where they were taking us. German U-boats patrol the seas all the time and three of the freighters in our big convoy were sunk by torpedoes just off the coast of Algeria. I thank God the Germans didn't sink the Derbyshire. Let's hope He stays by my side until I get home to your loving arms.*

*When we got to Sicily the sea was just awful. Rough like you wouldn't believe. That worked in our favour because the Germans believed, and rightly so if I may say so, that no one in their right mind would attempt a landing in that kind of weather. There was no resistance when we hit the beach. According to our company commander, there were more than 160,000 Allied troops involved in the landing at Sicily and about 3,000 ships and landing craft. We got stuck on a sandbar about 200 yards from shore and the ship with our kit bags got chased away by German planes. I've had no tooth brush or change of clothing for more than a month now. Ugh.*

*We're fighting our way north across Sicily along roads laid with mines through the scorching heat of the Sicilian summer. Darling, I've never in my life been in heat anything like this. They say it's 114 degrees in the shade. But there's no shade! Not a damned tree anywhere to be found. It's so hot, my dearest, you could fry eggs on my helmet. The sun hits you like*



*a welder's torch. Its glare on my eyeballs is so painful I'm marching with my head down and my eyes shut. I count six paces and open them again for a moment. Some of my mates have collapsed from heat exhaustion. I could sure use a slab of Lake Simcoe ice right about now.*

*The dust here is something fierce. It's everywhere. All over us. It's awfully fine powdery stuff and comes up in clouds off the roads when we're marching. I've tried putting a hanky over my mouth but it doesn't help all that much. Me and my mates are choking and coughing all the time. Covered in dust and grime we are. And*

*there's nowhere to wash it off. Water is as scarce as hen's teeth. We're always short of water to drink and don't even have enough to make tea let alone wash our filthy clothes. Our padre, bless his soul, is forever picking up melons along the road and giving us a slice now and then to help quench our thirst. From time to time, perhaps in answer to Padre East's prayers, we come across a donkey trough and splash ourselves to our hearts' content. But that doesn't happen often enough. Most of the time, my darling, we're thirsty and dirty.*

*We're plagued with malarial mosquitoes, fleas and scorpions all along the way. On top of that, dearest Martha, there's the non-stop din of the shelling and the bombing and the bloody sight of comrades lying dead and wounded at my side....*

*The mountainous terrain and winding roads here give Jerry an even bigger advantage. The odds are in his favour but we will beat him. The 48th will do that. We've got the Dileas spirit. I didn't know what the English words for the regiment's Gaelic motto "Dileas gu brath" were but I've been told it means Faithful Forever. That's our regiment's heart, lungs and guts. Faithful forever. That's our motto. That's what makes the 48th tick. That's how we act and think. That's why we fight as well as we do. If Jerry wanted to pick a fight he'd have been better off to pick it with someone other than the 48th Highlanders of Canada.*

*We've had to climb mountain cliffs and rock-faced terraces the Germans thought we'd never scale. We get up them clinging hands-on to the rock and often standing on the other mate's shoulders. But we do get up them, always at night, and then when dawn breaks we hit the surprised Germans with everything we've got....*

*God but I miss you so. I'd love to hold you in my arms right now. To feel you close to me.*

*Pray for me darling. It's a rough spot I'm in over here in the land of Caesar.*

*Love you to bits.*

*Your loving husband.*

TOM