

# Author Skibsrud reflects on her craft

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Johanna Skibsrud, author of the 2010 Giller winner *The Sentimentalists*, will be reading from her new collection of short stories, *This Will Be Difficult to Explain and Other Stories* at tonight's WordFest kickoff. We caught up with Skibsrud in Fredericton, N.B., where she was visiting her sister.

**Question:** Where do you write?

**Answer:** I just moved to sunny Arizona about a month ago (with fiance John Melillo, an English professor) and have a new writing space now. I just love it. There's lots of space for books and bookshelves. I've got lots of light in it. I'm so happy to have this room all to myself. One thing that I've learned in this past year is to become more flexible in when and where I write. It's now possible for me to write at various times and locations. But if I had my way, I would be writing in the morning in this beautiful, bright, private space.

**Q:** What do you write on?

**A:** I prefer taking notes by hand, but those are highly preliminary. I try to organize them, and then I just plunge right in, and that's on a computer. I was lugging around (an old computer) — someone made fun of me and called it a dinosaur. I've just bought a MacBook Air.

**Q:** In your new writing space, what are your favourite items?

**A:** On my desk — and they've been coming around with me for years now, I got them in Montreal and they came to Paris with me, even though it wasn't very practical — are a little figurine of a bird that had belonged to my grandmother, and a glass inkwell that had belonged to my father's family. Other than that, I really like to avoid clutter.

**Q:** Your latest book is a collection of short stories. Where did some of the ideas come from?

**A:** I was just talking about this to my mom, who had just finished reading the book. She said it was so funny because as she goes through, she can pick out an incident here and there, "Oh, I recognize that — it didn't look anything like that when I experienced it!" But she can still detect these traces. I could isolate in every story, one incident or event or idea that I had drawn



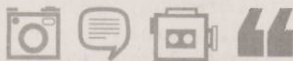
Mark Blinch, Reuters

**Johanna Skibsrud reacts after winning the Giller Prize for her book *The Sentimentalists* in 2010.**



WordFest presents Johanna Skibsrud at the Wednesday Night Showcase, which is sold out, and at Keepin' It Short Saturday at Vertigo Studio. Tickets and info at 403-237-9068 and [wordfest.com](http://wordfest.com).

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from my experience or from an anecdote that I had heard. Something strikes my interest, I'll make a mental note of it, and then build the story from there.

**Q:** When did you write the stories in *This Will Be Difficult To Explain*?

**A:** Most of them were written between 2004 and 2007. I've been rewriting and rewriting these stories — four of the nine have been published in literary journals, but even those, and especially one in particular, have been reworked. They still seem very fresh because they have been at the forefront of what I've been working on for a long time.