## Arts &Entertainment

## She traded analyst's couch for word processor

By AI Pope

DAWSON CITY surgeon, upon being introduced to Canadian author Margaret Laurence, mentioned that he too planned to write novels once he retired.

Laurence replied that in her own retirement she intended

to take up brain surgery.

The great novelist was simply squelching the doctor's arrogance, of course, but her remark illustrates another point:

Many people believe they could write, given the opportunity, but few are willing to risk the leap from the security of a paying job to the insecurity of the writer's

It strikes me as a long and brave leap from a lucrative career as a successful Toronto psychologist to living on a

modest stipend in Dawson's Berton House.

Novelist Julie Brickman waves aside this notion: "If something's pulling you to the next step, it doesn't take courage. It's just what you have to do.'

After 18 years as a clinical psychologist, Brickman knew that what she had to do was to

of articles in scholarly journals, but her interest had always been drawn to fiction

Not that she didn't move with "some trepidation" from
"a very lucrative field into a
field that pays about a nickel

But, she says, "I don't believe you can write well as a hobby. You have to make a commitment.

"I think, to become a writer, I had to learn to stop thinking of writing as the Grand Goal. As long as I was hoping to produce the Great Canadian Nov-. el, it interfered with the ability to get on with writing."

to get on with writing.
"Once I started thinking
about the individual steps, each accomplishment became important, even if it's just get-

ting the day's writing done."
Reaching her "middle
years," she came to realize that there was a limited time left to reach her goal of becoming an

"Of course, when you close a.psychology practice, you, have to give plenty of notice, to give people time to find another therapist."

So, in order to be able to phase out gradually, she applied for, and received,



BERTON RETREAT •.. Author Julie Brickman has just begun her stay at Dawson City's Berton House.

Canada Council grant to work on her first novel.

"That was a big step for me. Not so much the money, although that was important too because it allowed me to cut back on my practice, but it was the vindication that meant most to me. It meant somebody

believed in my writing."
The novel, What Birds Can
Only Whisper, was completed She had published a number during this winding-down peri-articles in scholarly journals, od, and had been submitted to publishers before she closed up the psychology shop. And then, on Monday, her

first day as a full-time writer, Turnstone Press called to accept the book.

"Ñot that I haven't had many a bad night since," she smiles, "but that was a great

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As a psychologist, Brickman specialized in women's issues, particularly rape and incest. What Birds Can Only Whis-per is the story of Kendra Quil-lan, a woman who, although involved in a loving and pas-sionate relationship, suffers sionate relationship, suffers total memory blackout when-ever she has sex.

The author makes no attempt to spin the mystery out till the end of the book; we soon know that Kendra suffers from multiple split personalities, caused by severe child-hood sexual abuse. The book follows her mental

breakdown, and her painful, sometimes brutal, journey back to sanity.

"I had long written and spo-ken about memory and incest, she says, "but the venues were no longer adequate for the vision I had accumulated over

years of work as a psycholo-

"High-pitched little voices with complete childhood memory would pop out of patients, who had been unforthcoming, even defensive.

"I tried to write about *this* as a clinician, but it wasn't enough. Only fiction offered the scope I needed,"

It was upon quitting the psychology practice that Brickman decided to move to San Diego, California.

"Once I didn't have a practice, I realized I could live where I wanted, and I thought it would be nice to be warm for a while.

So then how on earth did she end up in Dawson City

"I had wanted to come for a while. I'd heard about the beauty, the isolation, but I was discouraged by the cost.
"And then (a friend) told me

about the Berton House, and it seemed like the perfect oppor-

tunity.
"I wanted one of the characters in the novel I'm working on to be from the Yukon.
"I didn't really think that I

would get (the Berton House cement), but I knew I want ed it. I really went at that appli-

This last statement causes no surprise; it doesn't take long to form an impression of Brickman as someone who "really goes after" the things which capture her interest. The Berton House is the childhood home of author Pierre Berton.

He purchased it and had it renovated to provide "a room of one's own" for Canadian

major work

Brickman is just two weeks into a three-month stay in the clean, well-lighted little place, when I drop by to interview her for this story.

She sits in the sole armchair, next to the Berton House library, a bookcase stocked mainly with Berton's own works; I relax on the ouch, notebook on knee, Chilkoot Amber on hand.

Already, *this* southern transplant shows a talent for Yukon hospitality.

Montreal born, raised in

New Jersey, educated in Winnipeg and recently a resident of Toronto and then San Diego, Brickman was shocked when she got her first look at Dawson and realized how small the community really is.

"I can't believe I'm going to live here," was her first reac

Two weeks later, she is 'head over heels in love

with the place.
"I've met more people in the two weeks I've been here than in the two years I've lived in San Diego.

"And I think it's the people who are really knocking me out. It's not just that I'm amazed at the lifestyles; it's that there seem to be more multi-talented, interesting, energetic people here than I've ever seen in one place." The life-long urbanite,

whose previous wilderness experience has all been in "cottage country," has just taken a dog-sled trip to the Stewart River home of musher Kyla Boivin.

"It was fascinating, wonderful," she says. "I have a kind of instinctive respect for people here that I didn't feel in California. It's something about their independence, their selfreliance - especially in the

While living in the Berton House, Brickman is working on her second novel, The Emp ty Quarter, set in the United Arab Emirates, an Arabian Gulf country where she once lived.

The Empty Quarter, or Rub al Khali, is the blistering 'desert of deserts,' where even Bedouin raiders once feared to travel.

And the future?
"I've always loved crime fiction: especially Ross McDonald, that intricate interweaving of family tales. I'd like to write a crime novel someday.'