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## AT THE DESK: ALLISON BAGGIO

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For each book we readers eagerly open, there's a writer who's spent countless hours researching, organizing, writing and rewriting. The place where all this happens is unique to every writer, and we love nothing more than to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the site where it all happens! In Open Book's [At The Desk](#) series, writers tell us about their creative processes and the workspaces that inspire them.

Allison Baggio, who makes her home in Whitby, is fascinated by the ways in which our bodies tell stories. In her books, the body is a conduit for the spirit, a tangible manifestation of the experience of life. And it doesn't always play by the rules. In Allison's coming-of-age novel *Girl in Shades* (ECW Press), young Maya can see colours around people's bodies and even sometimes read their thoughts. Allison first turned to this theme in her collection of short stories, *In the Body* (ECW Press), which includes stories on organ transplants and life after traumatic injury. Today Allison talks to Open Book about the desk where she writes – and the one where she doesn't.

Allison Baggio is one of our featured authors in this month's [Focus On: Durham Region – The Recommended Reads](#).

I have a perfectly nice desk in my home. It's in an office that's all mine. There's a big window looking out at the birch tree in front of my house, and shelves that are filled with my favourite and most inspiring books. Surprisingly enough, this desk is not where I write. I can edit, revise, plan and obsess there, but can't really get any new writing done. The reason for this is quite simple: my desk is surrounded by ordinary things, is where I undertake my mundane duties and is way too familiar a place to write.



I don't want my writing to feel safe and familiar the way my home office does. I aspire to create writing that is new, fresh and exciting and the very best way for me to do this is to go somewhere new, fresh and exciting. Wherever I go, it has to be a place that allows me to stop thinking about boring things like paying bills, making shopping lists and planning parties for four-year-olds. Since I write mainly on a Neo machine (think light keyboard, long battery life and tiny screen that only lets me see a few lines at a time), I can easily take my writing time pretty much anywhere I decide.

Often this escape happens in the corner of a library, or in a coffee shop at a small table surrounded by strangers who are talking about things I don't understand and have no business listening to. Sometimes I've sat in a food court in a new city, feet clomping on shiny floors, the aroma of tacos and hamburgers beckoning me to fast food counters. Or (and this is rare), I could be on a sunny vacation to another country, set-up on a hotel bed or on a cement balcony with various sounds of vacationing going on around me. In those cases I usually smell like coconut suntan lotion and am

100% well-rested (which is always vital to my productive writing times).

My most favourite place to write however, is in, or looking out upon, nature. There's something about the freshness of a forest, a lake, a misty river, that frees up my writing flow. In my opinion, it's impossible to write from your rational, thinking mind. Instead, you need to shut all that off and let your "higher self" take over. You must find that special, non-thinking place from where the words come, and go there as often as you can. Being in nature helps me do this, and I'm never more excited than when I have the opportunity to write in an inspiring natural environment.

I wrote the last chapters of my first novel, *Girl in Shades*, in a remote cabin near Algonquin Park. It was January, and the writing appeared so quickly that I finished way before I thought I would, and was left freezing and lonely in the wilderness for three more days. A great deal of my current manuscript was written during summer afternoons at family cottages (much more comfortable than a winter cabin). I am usually quite pleased with the work I am able to accomplish during these types of trips, and back at home, my desk waits for me, perfectly happy to support me in all the neurotic revisions that are yet to come.



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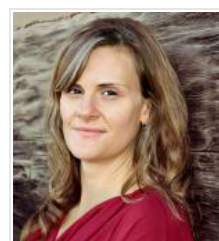
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Allison Baggio is the author of *Girl in Shades*, which was called "an immensely satisfying coming-of-age tale and remarkable first novel" by *Chatelaine* and picked as a "book to curl up with this winter" by *Canadian Family Magazine*. She's also the author of the short story collection, *In the Body*, which was chosen as a Canadian favourite of 2012 by the *National Post* and deemed "impressive" by *Publishers Weekly*. She lives in Durham Region and works as a fundraising writer and college professor. You can find her online at [allisonbaggio.com](http://allisonbaggio.com).

For more information about *In the Body* please visit the [ECW website](#).

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