Alden Nowlan was born into rural poverty in Stanley, Nova Scotia, adjacent to Mosherville, and close to the small town of Windsor, Nova Scotia, along a stretch of dirt road that he would later refer to as Desolation Creek. His father, Gordon Freeman Nowlan, worked sporadically as a manual labourer.

His mother, Grace Reese, was only 15 years of age when Nowlan was born, and she soon left the family, leaving Alden and her younger daughter Harriet, to the care of their paternal grandmother. The family discouraged education as a waste of time, and Nowlan left school after only four grades. At the age of 14, he went to work in the village sawmill. At the age of 16, Nowlan discovered the regional library. Each weekend he would walk or hitchhike eighteen miles to the library to get books, and secretly began to educate himself. "I wrote (as I read) in secret." Nowlan remembered. "My father would as soon have seen me wear lipstick."

**Career and later Life**

At 19, Nowlan's artfully embroidered résumé landed him a job with Observer, a newspaper in Hartland, New Brunswick. While working at the Observer, Nowlan began writing books of poetry, the first of which was published by Fredericton's Fiddlehead Poetry Books.

Nowlan eventually settled permanently in New Brunswick. In 1963, he married Claudine Orser, a typesetter on his former paper, and moved to Saint John with her and her son, John, whom he adopted. He became the night editor for the Saint John Telegraph Journal and continued to write poetry. In 1967, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and his collection Bread, Wine and Salt was awarded the Governor General's Award for Poetry.

In 1966, Nowlan was diagnosed with throat cancer. His health forced him to give up his job, but at the same time the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton offered him the position of Writer-in-Residence. He remained in the position until his death on June 27, 1983.

**Awards and recognition**

Nowlan's most notable literary achievements include the Governor General's Award for Bread, Wine and Salt (1967) and a Guggenheim Fellowship. He took over the job Writer-in-Residence at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton from close friend Warren Kinthompson in 1968 and kept it until his
death in 1983. He has a provincial poetry award named in his honour.

Nowlan is one of Canada's most popular 20th-century poets, and his appearance in the anthology Staying Alive (2002) has helped to spread his popularity beyond Canada.

In the 1970s, Nowlan met and became close friends with theatre director Walter Learning. The two collaborated on a number of plays, including Frankenstein, The Dollar Woman, and The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca.

The home of the Graduate Student Association at the University of New Brunswick is called the Alden Nowlan House.

Nowlan is buried in the Poets' Corner of the Forest Hill cemetery in Fredericton, New Brunswick.
A Certain Kind Of Holy Men

Not every wino is a Holy Man.
Oh, but some of them are.
I love those who've learned
to sit comfortably
for long periods with their hams
pressed against their calves,
outdoors,
with a wall for a back-rest,
contentedly saying nothing.
These move about only when
necessary,
on foot, and almost always
in pairs.
I think of them as oblates.
Christ's blood is in their veins
or they thirst for it.
They have looked into the eyes
of God,
unprotected by smoked glass.

Alden Nowlan
A mysterious naked man has been reported on Cranston Avenue. The police are performing the usual ceremonies with coloured lights and sirens. Almost everyone is outdoors and strangers are conversing excitedly as they do during disasters when their involvement is peripheral.

'What did he look like?' the lieutenant is asking.
'I don't know,' says the witness. 'He was naked.'

There is talk of dogs—this is no ordinary case of indecent exposure, the man has been seen a dozen times since the milkman spotted him and now the sky is turning purple and voices carry a long way and the children have gone a little crazy as they often do at dusk and cars are arriving from other sections of the city.

And the mysterious naked man is kneeling behind a garbage can or lying on his belly in somebody's garden or maybe even hiding in the branches of a tree, where the wind from the harbour whips at his naked body, and by now he's probably done whatever it was he wanted to do and wishes he could go to sleep or die or take to the air like Superman.

Alden Nowlan
A Poem About Miracles

Why don't the records go blank
the instant the singer dies?
Oh, I know there are explanations
but they don't convince me
I'm still surprised
When I hear the dead singing
As for orchestra's
I expect the Instruments
To fall silent one by one
as the musicians succumb
to cancer and heart disease
so that toward the end
I turn on a disc
labelled Gotterdammerung
and all that comes out
is the sound of one sick old man
scraping a shaky bow
across an out-of-tune fiddle.

Alden Nowlan
I used to broadcast at night
alone in a radio station
but I was never good at it
partly because my voice wasn't right
but mostly because my peculiar
metaphysical stupidity
made it impossible
for me to keep believing
their was somebody listening
when it seemed I was talking
only to myself in a room no bigger
than an ordinary bathroom
I could believe it for a while
and then I'd get somewhat
the same feeling as when you
start to suspect you're the victim
of a practical joke
So one part of me
was afraid another part
might blurt out something
about myself so terrible
that even I had never until
that moment suspected it

This was like the fear
of bridges and other
high places: Will I take off my glasses
and throw them
into the water, although I'm
half blind without them?
Will I sneak up behind
myself and push?

Another thing:
As a reporter
I covered an accident in which a train
ran into a car, killing
three young men, one of whom
was beheaded. The bodies looked
boneless, as such bodies do
More like mounds of rags
and inside the wreckage
where nobody could get at it
the car radio
was still playing

I thought about places
the disc jockey's voice goes
and the things that happen there
and of how impossible it would be for him
to continue if he really knew.

Alden Nowlan
The Anatomy Of Angels

Angels inhabit love songs. But they’re sprites not seraphim. The angel that up-ended Jacob had sturdy calves, moist hairy armpits, stout loins to serve the god whom she befriended, and was adept at wrestling. She wore a cobra like a girdle. Yet his bone mending he spent some several tedious weeks marking the bed they’d shared, with a great stone.

Alden Nowlan
The Bull Moose

Down from the purple mist of trees on the mountain,
lurching through forests of white spruce and cedar,
stumbling through tamarack swamps,
came the bull moose
to be stopped at last by a pole-fenced pasture.

Too tired to turn or, perhaps, aware
there was no place left to go, he stood with the cattle.
They, scenting the musk of death, seeing his great head
like the ritual mask of a blood god, moved to the other end
of the field, and waited.

The neighbours heard of it, and by afternoon
cars lined the road. The children teased him
with alder switches and he gazed at them
like an old, tolerant collie. The woman asked
if he could have escaped from a Fair.

The oldest man in the parish remembered seeing
a gelded moose yoked with an ox for plowing.
The young men snickered and tried to pour beer
down his throat, while their girl friends took their pictures.

And the bull moose let them stroke his tick-ravaged flanks,
let them pry open his jaws with bottles, let a giggling girl
plant a little purple cap
of thistles on his head.

When the wardens came, everyone agreed it was a shame
to shoot anything so shaggy and cuddlesome.
He looked like the kind of pet
women put to bed with their sons.

So they held their fire. But just as the sun dropped in the river
the bull moose gathered his strength
like a scaffolded king, straightened and lifted his horns
so that even the wardens backed away as they raised their rifles.

When he roared, people ran to their cars. All the young men
leaned on their automobile horns as he toppled.

Submitted by cutebabystar

Alden Nowlan
The Masks Of Love

I come in from a walk
With you
And they ask me
If it is raining.

I didn’t notice
But I’ll have to give them
The right answer
Or they’ll think I’m crazy.

Alden Nowlan