

Jill Murray

Author,

Break On Through

www.JillMurray.com

mail@jillmurray.com

514-927-3454



“Jill Murray’s *Break On Through* is a YA Novel with substance and style...
The author has a fresh, contemporary voice.”
– *Annie Murray, Montreal Review of Books.*

"Murray presents an engaging and dynamic portrait of “now”
- *Erin McLeod, Montreal Mirror*

“Jill Murray takes readers beyond the expected...
Murray's novel could form part of an arts research project in [hip hop] since
it is vivid and represents the culture of breakdancing so well.”
– *Ann Ketcheson, CM Magazine*

Break on Through is a first YA novel for wanna-b-girl, Jill “2-left” Murray. Set in a remote suburb of Toronto, it follows the misadventures of Nadine "Lady 6Sky" Durant, as she struggles to define a place for herself and breakdancing (b-girling) after she is abruptly cut off from the beloved inner-city neighborhood of her childhood.

With *Break On Through*, Jill Murray has delivered lectures, readings and assorted events at Harbourfront Centre's ALOUD reading festival (Toronto), at book stores, dance studios, and after-school programmes. With young and not-so-young audiences, she explores the writing process, the cultural history of hip hop, and contemporary urban & suburban issues. Murray's presentations make use of audio-visual media, and can include b-girl (breakdance) demos with a professional dancer to combine literacy with physical activity. Murray is currently working on her novel and accepting bookings for the 2008 summer festival season and 08-09 school year.

Lecture, Reading & Workshop Formats

Jill Murray is available for the following types of bookings. Please note that all types of bookings can be customized according to your curriculum and other needs, and the size of your class or group.

Lectures & Readings

For larger groups, I have developed a presentation format that includes a multimedia-supported overview of the history of b-girling (breakdance) and hip hop, as well as a reading, question-answer period, and if desired, a live demonstration of the different components of b-girling, with a professional dancer. (Such as b-girl Feisty from Montreal's Solid State Breakdance). The presentation can be adapted to work not only for English, but also for dance, performing arts and general phys ed classes.

A more traditional format, emphasizing readings and discussion of the writing process is also available.

Writing workshops

Writing workshops can be developed to fit the curriculum of your course. Recommended topics using Break On Through as jumping-off point include character development, dialogue, setting, and action.

Meetings and Discussions

I am also available for a day of meetings and discussions, as needed.



Literary Breakdown

Novel

Jill Murray loves breakdancing. There's just one problem. "I'm not very good at it. I injure myself constantly," she says. "But I love it and I thought I'd like to give something back to dancing, but it's not obviously going to be dancing itself." The result is *Break On Through*, a novel centring on Nadine, a fiercely independent teenage b-girl from Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood whose world is turned upside down when her parents decide to uproot and move to the fictional and decidedly uncool suburb of Rivercrest. The novel explores how Nadine wrestles with assertively reclaiming her b-girl identity through her relationships with family, friends and the inherently hip-hop theme of locale. Murray hopes the book will put more focus on b-girling and on how women involved in this aspect of hip-hop culture interact with it.

"There are far more b-girls practicing and taking classes and having their own little underground clubs than show up to battles," Murray says. "I'm not sure exactly what it will take to break down that barrier, but I think for sure more women should be encouraged to cross it."

The Montreal-based writer's incorporation of hip-hop culture extends to its other elements too — the book is sprinkled with references to classic hip-hop tracks and a nod to graffiti, as well as a subtle and thought-provoking critique of the b-boy history documentary *The Freshest Kids*, so it's no small wonder it has been welcomed in hip-hop circles. Murray has also been handing out *Nadine's Mixtape* — a CD deftly blended and created by Toronto's DJ Dalia and Murray's partner, acclaimed MC More Or Les — at *Break On Through's* book launch events. The mixtape features an all-Canadian line-up including Shad, Abdominal, Eternia and fittingly enough, More Or Les, rhyming about themes central to *Break On Through*. "[More or Les] recruited all these great MCs and we were really lucky they were excited about the project."

Del F. Couie

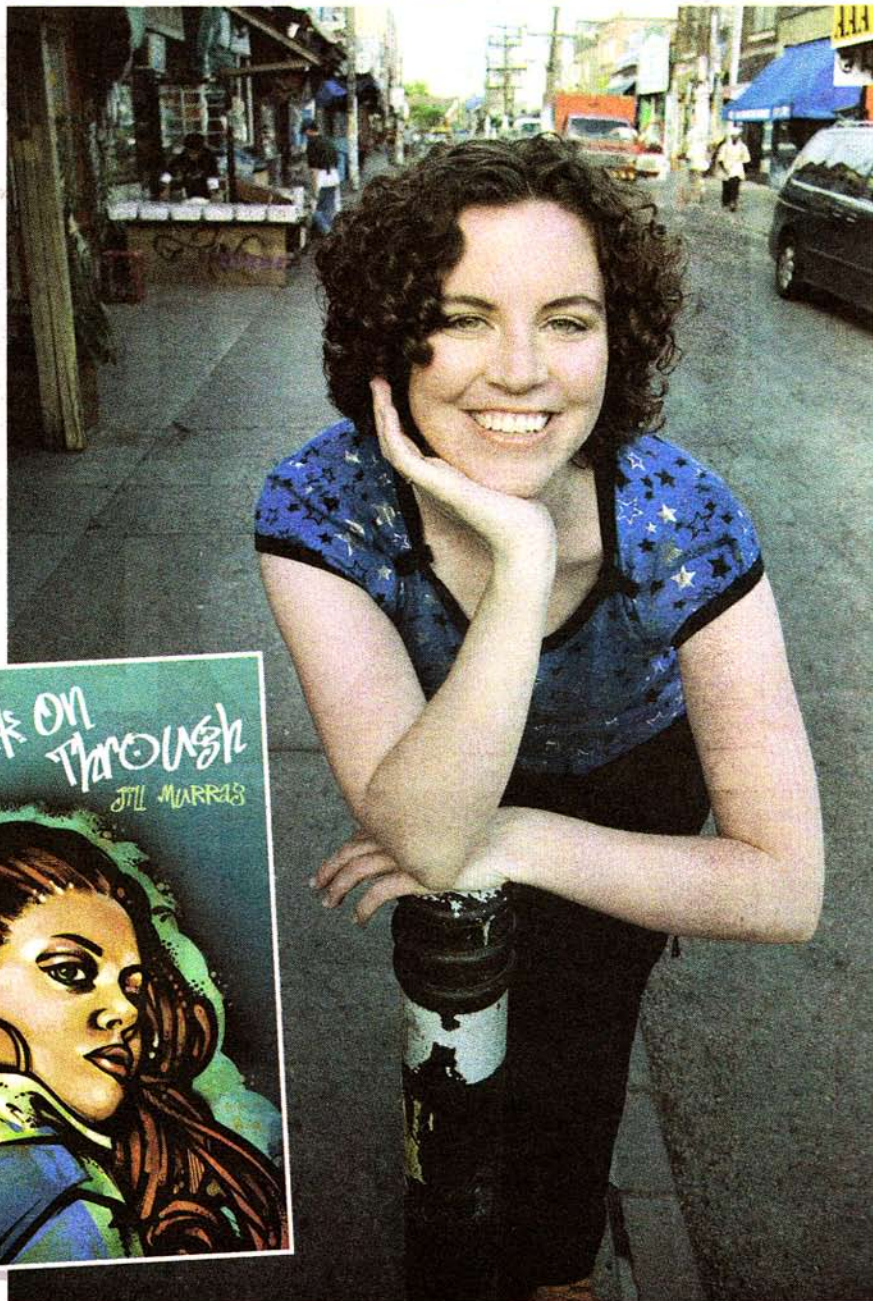


PHOTO: CHE KOTIYARI

Can she kick it?

Montrealer Jill Murray explores Toronto's gritty Parkdale neighbourhood through the eyes of a teen b-girl in her debut novel *Break on Through*



CHE KOTHARI

NO TRAINING WHEELS NECESSARY: Murray

by ERIN MACLEOD

Montreal's own Jill Murray started writing a so-called "adult" novel, but came out the other end with *Break on Through*, a young adult book that shows age ain't nothin' but a number.

"I never set out specifically to write YA," explains Murray. "I wouldn't say 'this is training wheels for adult books.' I don't see it that way. For me, the distinction between the YA and the adult is just that you're writing about a young character from their own perspective and putting values on their lives and experiences. That doesn't preclude adults reading it

and it doesn't preclude it being a serious book."

The perspective in Murray's debut novel is that of 15-year-old Nadine "Lady Six Sky" Durant, a girl who is much more interested in breakdancing battles than moving to the 'burbs. Is the book autobiographical? "People ask what it was like growing up in the inner-city being a teenage breakdancer and I have to tell them that I have no idea, that I come from the antagonistic suburbs that she moves to!"

Drawing from her own recollection of what it was like to be 15, however, was helpful for Murray: "I didn't really think too hard about the

actual age range that it was supposed to appeal to and just thought about the character. I used my memories—fortunately those are pretty close to the surface," she laughs.

The book's depiction of suburban Toronto sheds some light on an environment that has historically received short shrift in CanLit. "If you look over past book award winners, there's not a lot of urban and there's really not a lot of suburban. I don't know what we're trying to pull here, but most Canadians live in or near a major urban centre. This is what is happening now."

Murray presents an engaging and dynamic portrait of "now"—and it's a portrait that isn't only for kids. "I'm hearing from a lot of adults who are shocked and surprised that they enjoy young adult literature," explains Murray. "And the hip hop community has embraced it pretty warmly. They don't care what age range it's targeted for. They're just happy to see a story that rings true." ■

MURRAY READS FROM *BREAK ON THROUGH* SATURDAY, MAY 10 AT 3 P.M. AT BABAR BOOKS (46 STE-ANNE) IN POINTE CLAIRE. SEE WWW.JILLMURRAY.COM FOR DETAILS.



Required reading

Murray's law: the author's top YA picks

"When I was 15 or 16, there were fewer YA novels," recalls Murray. *Sweet Valley High* and *Hardy Boys* have been outnumbered by incredible variety. "It's really branched out and multiplied in the last maybe 15 years," she says. Here's a list of a couple of classics and a few contemporary faves.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Technically YA. They're young characters. They're not adults, really. The intertwining themes of madness and revenge, of never really knowing what's going on or who to trust—I mean, that's pretty high school. Who isn't Rosencrantz or Guildenstern in the average cafeteria?

Gordon Korman

I read a lot of Korman's books, as much as the librarians tried to tell me that they were for boys. *Don't Care High* and *Son of Interflux* and *A Semester in the Life of a Garbage Bag* all made me laugh out loud and I read each of them maybe 40 or 50 times. I found them inspiring—the height of breadth of antics that kids could get up to all on their own and the creativity that went into zany schemes.

E. Lockhart, *Fly on the Wall*

A girl named Gretchen Yi goes to an arts high school and doesn't really fit in. She doesn't understand the male psyche and she wishes that she could be a fly on the wall in the boys' locker room. So, like *Metamorphosis*, she wakes up and she is a fly and spends a week trapped in there.

M.T. Anderson, *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation Vol. 1 The Pox Party*

Anderson lives in the Boston area and he got this idea by being surrounded by all this history and wondered what it would have been like to be living on the eve of the revolution, not knowing how it would turn out. So he wrote from this position, and I don't want to say anything else about it, because it really depends on discovery. It's a really dense, challenging book and really interesting. There's no reason why it couldn't just be put on an adult shelf.

Coe Booth, *Tyrell*

The main character is 15 and his family has been kicked out of the projects and they are living out of garbage bags, in temporary shelters, which are basically just run-down hotels, while they wait for more suitable lodging. It's so realistic. You read it and you want to do something, you're completely frustrated with the world. It's amazing.

—EM

ENTERTAINMENT

THE BIG MAC
Rick Miller returns
with MacHomer
PAGE E3



HER BIG BREAK
B-girl Jill Murray pens
breakdancing novel
PAGE E9

RAZZIE-DAZZIE
Who'll win big at the
Razzies? Hint: Norbit
PAGE E8



BOOKS < ENTERTAINMENT

JILL MURRAY

Showing b-girls how to make a break for it

Sexism, parents who make you move to the 'burbs
— just part of life for a young female breakdancer

RAJU MUDHAR
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

Nadine "Lady Six Sky" Durant is having a "parents just don't understand" life.

A b-girl to the core, the 15-year-old's parents have decided to uproot her from the only home she's known in Parkdale to the suburban hell that is Rivercrest. How will she continue her life pursuits of breakdancing and, more importantly, keep on practising with her crew, Tha Rackit Club, so that they can strut their stuff among the city's best in the big Hogtown Show-down?

That's the premise of *Break On Through*, the new young adult novel by 30-year-old author/blogger Jill Murray. A recent returnee to her native Montreal, she used to live, like her main character, just down the road from the infamous Toronto 'hood where the book starts. It helped inform her story of her breakdancing heroine, as did the author's own adventure in the world of six steps, top rocks and windmills.

In addition to those similarities, the book is written in the first person — so the question is, did any other autobiographical elements make it into the story?

"It's not autobiographical at all," Murray insists. "There's no similarity between me and the main character on any level. She's a cute, skilled breakdancer and I am not."

Murray became intrigued with breakdancing after befriending some of the folks from shebang!, the all-girl breakdancing crew that has performed around the city for years. She first saw them perform at the launch event for rapper More or Les's first album. He also happens to be her significant other.

"I saw them for the first time and I went to one of their battles, and that's how I became interested in breakdancing," she says.

"I started taking their classes. I was interested in b-girling to begin with but I realized that my contribution to the genre was never going to be dancing, so I thought okay, my contribution to advancing the cause of b-girls can be to write this story."

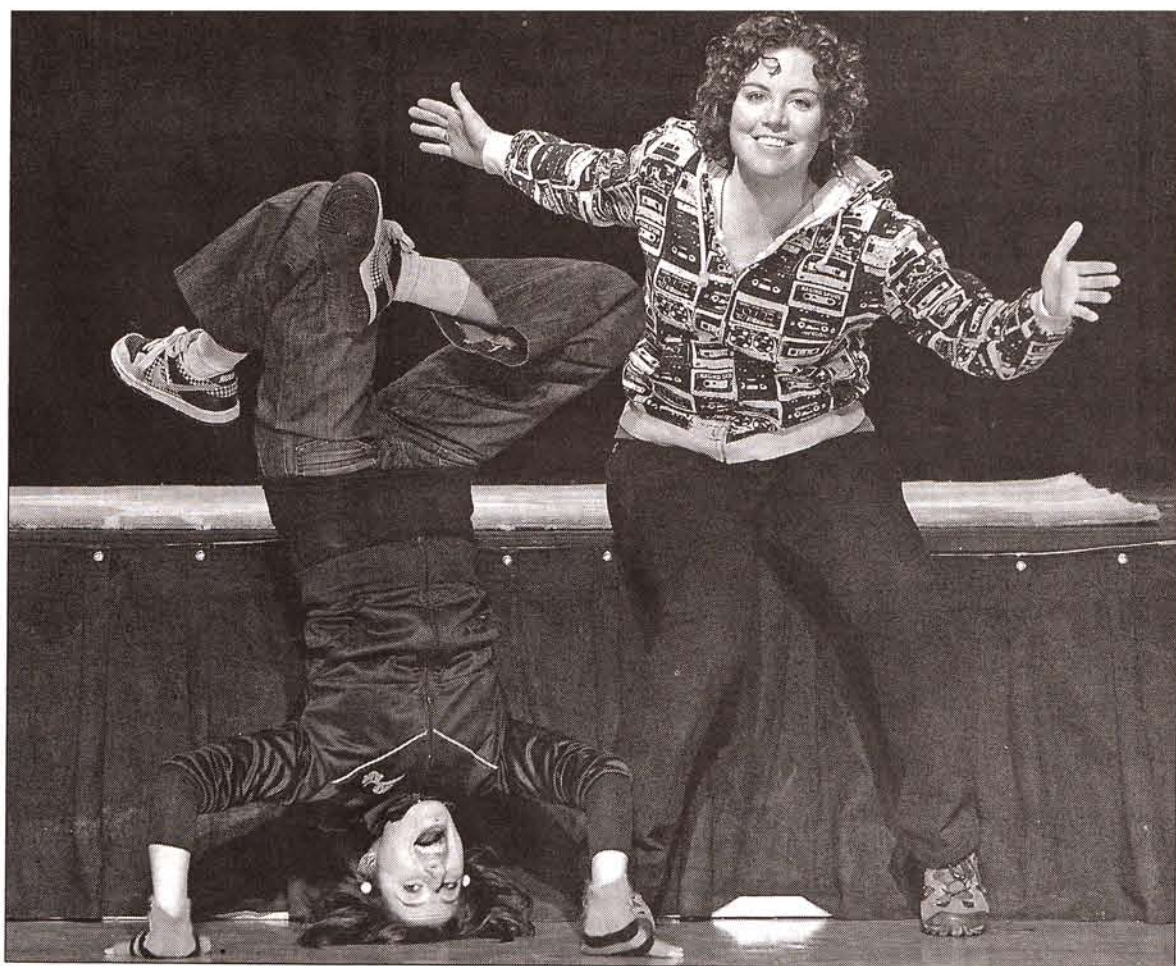
In telling Nadine's story, one of the most interesting aspects is what seems to be the inherent sexism that female breakdancers face. There is a prevalence of thought that they can't perform the moves because they lack upper body strength. There is also the thought that b-boys want to impress girls with their moves, but don't really want them to join them on the floor.

"I think everyone's experience is unique, but I know in the past, there have been people who have been frustrated by the male-dominated aspect, not because they don't want to work themselves hard enough to become good enough to compete on that level, but because they feel there's an assumption that they can't," she says. "I don't want to pin that experience on anyone in particular, but it does happen, and I think it is fairly well documented in Martha Cooper and Nika Kramer's *We B*Girls*, which came out about a year and a half ago."

It will be a much more celebratory affair tonight at the free, all-ages event at the Street Dance Academy (160 Spadina Ave., 2nd floor, 416-840-4934), where *Break On Through* gets its proper Toronto launch with performances by emcees Abdominal, Sunny D, More or Les and DJ Dalia. Murray will also be giving out an exclusive, all-Canadian mix tape created by More or Les for the book. The mix tape will only be available at events associated with *Break On Through*.

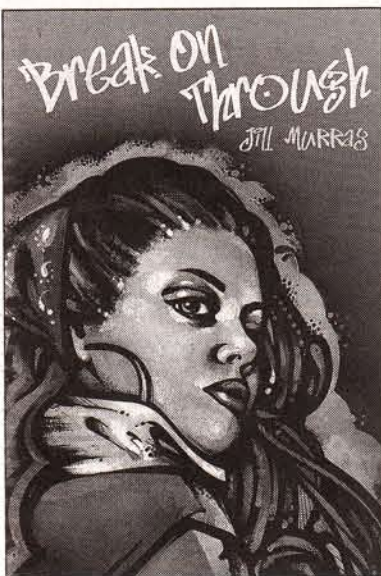
"There's also going to be a re-enactment of a scene called Break-down from the novel," she says. "And there will be a student-teacher battle featuring people from the Street Dance Academy."

Right now, Murray is working toward building momentum with the book, with hopes of putting together some kind of book tour. Beyond that, she's already back writing her second novel, which features Alya, one of *Break On Through*'s characters. It tells what happens when she gets recruited for an R&B group.



VINCE TALOTTA/TORONTO STAR

Author Jill Murray, right, and shebang! founding member Mae Hem bust some moves at a recent launch for Murray's new young adult novel *Break on Through*, about a female breakdancer. Another free all-ages event to celebrate the book takes place at 7:30 tonight at Street Dance Academy, 160 Spadina Ave.



Jill Murray's novel follows b-girl Nadine "Lady Six Sky" Durant.