

MADOC LIBRARY – VIRTUAL AUTHOR

Hello Madoc Library Patrons !

My name is Robin Timmerman. I'm a member of Crime Writers of Canada and your library has asked me to write a bit about becoming an author of murder mysteries. Gotta love our libraries – we're so lucky to have these supportive resources.

MY MIDDLE ISLAND MYSTERY SERIES

I have written five books in the series. The novels take place on a fictional island in Eastern Ontario – some people have fun trying to link the locations to spots in Prince Edward County where I live. There may be some similarities, but Middle Island is a much smaller world and the characters and places are all creations of my imagination.

I wasn't really setting out to write a mystery series at all. I started writing the first book, *Pity of the Winds* because I was concerned about the rift in my community over the wind turbine controversy. The people in my story would have pulled together in the face of a natural disaster such as a flood or a tornado yet they were caught up in an issue so divisive, it threatened to tear the fabric of their community apart. It quickly developed into a murder mystery, all that tension in the community had to erupt somewhere !

MY DETECTIVES.

Much as I enjoy the British police procedurals featuring a three-times divorced, world-weary, recovering alcoholic detective, I chose to write about a younger couple – former soldier Pete Jakes and his Turkish-born wife Ali. Pete's last posting was in Afghanistan but after a serious brush with a roadside explosive, he decided to switch careers and look for peace as a policeman in rural Ontario. Unfortunately, this being a murder mystery, the Jakes find anything but.

WHY DID I WRITE A SECOND BOOK

After publishing *Winds*, some people actually asked if there would be another book. They wanted to read more about the characters. That was very gratifying. Then there were the types of comments I received from readers. 'Reading the book was like a walk down my town's Main Street' 'The characters seemed real and believable.' People telephoned and wrote me that they had enjoyed reading the story. Then the book won the County Reads event, an exciting honour.

I followed up with *Season of Deceit* and *Crimes of Summer*. Any of the books can be read on their own but it's probably more fun to read them in sequence as they follow events in the main characters' lives as well.

A reviewer wrote: "The Jakes are smart, sexy and likeable, the supporting cast are richly drawn."

A smart, sexy couple ! To think that I'd created these characters and people enjoyed reading about them. Let me tell you, that is one big thrill.

A special joy of writing, is meeting and getting to know these people that you have created. Each time I begin a new book, I'm looking forward to checking in on everybody, seeing what they're up to ! So a new story starts to work its way out of my thoughts. *Threat of Autumn* was the fourth book. *Out of the Running* is the fifth book in the series and features all the familiar characters from the previous books, plus of course some new villains.

The story is centred around an Island Marathon to raise funds for the local Hospital. The influx of tourists may be good for Island business but it's a headache for Chief Halstead and Officer Jakes. Especially when bodies start to appear on the Marathon route and it seems that some people are literally dying to run.

WHERE DO I GET PLOT IDEAS ?

All kinds of influences go into the writing of a book. The writer's mind or anyone's is a hodge podge of observations, memories, thoughts random and profound. In *Season of Deceit* I was struck by a story I'd heard of an elderly woman living in miserable circumstances who didn't want any help from social services or other agencies. I wondered whether she might have something to hide and what that might be. It turned out in my story that others on the Island might have something to hide as well.

There are story opportunities anywhere where people gather together. Even if they have good intentions, competing egos, jealousies, tensions and friction arise. Luckily most of these occasions don't result in murder! The mystery writer just takes things a little further. A sense of fun helps too

WHY WRITE MYSTERY STORIES?

I like reading mystery stories, so do millions of other people. Recent statistics show that mysteries are now the top selling genre in all book sales, replacing romance novels – (what does that say about our aging population?) And Canadian writers are right up there, becoming world-famous as their stories are

made into movies and television series. Think of the inspiring examples of Maureen Jennings and Louise Penny. There are mysteries for every taste (there is an entire genre devoted to cat detectives!) and writing ranging from cozy to blood-curdling suspense. The books are set in every corner of the world.

HOW TO GET STARTED ?

Somerset Maugham once wrote, “There are three rules to novel writing. Unfortunately no one knows what they are.” True enough. But of course there are some basic guidelines. There are lots of books out there with lots of help and advice, some of it very good information. But as in many endeavours, I find the writing advice means more after you have tried it for awhile. Then you know the questions to ask. However, there are two basic, common sense recommendations included in all these manuals.

ONE. FIND OR CREATE A WRITING SPACE.

I’ve carried a notebook and pen around with me all my life. I’ve woken up at night and written in the dark on paper napkins. But eventually you need a place to physically and mentally pull those thoughts together.

It doesn’t have to be a custom-built hideaway on the back lawn (very few of us ever have anything like that!). You just need a place to be quiet and alone. And your family and friends have to respect that. Or at least get used to that.

TWO. MAKE TIME TO WRITE.

Tell yourself over and over again that your writing time is as important as any other job, even if you have no other validation yet (such as fame or money!). Make other people believe that. That’s the only way to find out if you really want to write.

I think to tie novel writing to your way to make a living is too big a load. Ditto to fame and glory. You have to find your art’s worth in your own estimation.

A personally inspiring quote, which I’ve heard attributed to John Steinbeck – ‘The first million words are the hardest.’

And they are – but it does get easier over time. Then there’s the Canadian winter. Thinking up stories is a great way to pass those long winter evenings. I recommend it !

