

Criminal Intent

Featuring: Catherine Astolfo

Interviewed by: Janet Costello



Catherine Astolfo has written three books, all part of the Emily Taylor series. She is the National Vice-President of Crime Writers of Canada. For five years, she has been our Sister in Crime.

Q: Your books involve the Ojibway people, lifestyles, and their struggles in today's society. How did you go about your research to be able to write about this so naturally?

I have a friend who is half Ojibway. Through his mother, I have experienced spiritualism, and native customs. Of course, I've done a lot of reading, but I have the first-hand experience, too.

Q: Tell us about the artists involved in your books. Merci Fournier did the poetry. We've been friends of 30 years. She's been published in small Canadian publications. The cover artist is my niece, Carly Smith. Her work is displayed in the Ottawa Children's hospital. Helen Duplassie did maps and the circle of footprints piece that is in *Victim*.

Q: In the Acknowledgements of "Victim" you attribute Agnes with giving you an interest in natural history, ever since that trip in the woods. Please share that trip.

This was a time when I was up with Helen and Sandy and Agnes, Sandy's mother. In the White River area. We went across the river by canoe. Agnes cooked bannock. Sandy caught fish. Agnes prepared them and told us about the folklore.

Q: "Victim" promotes the ideal of using land for need, not greed. Living in Brampton, are you able to embrace this personally?

I would say not. I think it's difficult when you're living in a city. But one thing I do like about Brampton - there are lots of walking trails and parks. I always let the city councillors know I value the rules that protect these open spaces.

Q: All of your books have characters harbouring secrets. Talk about this as a device in mystery writing.

I've always been interested in the masks that people wear. The Bear mask in *Victim* is a great symbol for this. I am fascinated by the layers of people, and the real person beneath those layers. It can be an ordinary façade covering great evil or great love. As a technique for mystery writers it is a great element to show people being shocked or experience other

reactions.

Q: "Legacy", your latest book, and "Victim" have been published by Lulu and Trafford respectively. How have you benefited from these non-traditional forms of publishing?

When you are independently publishing, you get to be in control. My niece and a friend were able to do the covers. That means a lot to me. The other thing is, with commercial publishers, that don't do the marketing, you don't get a great financial return or personal rewards. Of course, this kind of publishing is still difficult. Luckily Sisters in Crime and Crime Writers of Canada are very inclusive. My books are taken on their own merits. Outside those circles, though, you can feel like a second class citizen.

Q: How can your readers find your books, especially your Canadian readers?

The best way is to email me at castolfo@rogers.com or go on my website. You can order from Trafford or Lulu, but with the U.S. dollar and shipping, it's expensive.

Q: Your short story took second prize this year at Bloody Words. Tell us about it.

It's called *Family Recipe*. It's a story of a trunk, delivered to a woman's house. She finds dark family secrets inside. This has a tongue-and-cheek overtone. For the contest, it had to be set in Ottawa. My sister lives there, so that was easy. I think it will be published in the Bloody Words Program booklet for 2010. You can always email me for a copy.

Q: What are you working on now?

I'm working on book four of the Emily Taylor series, *Seventh Fire*. I hope to have it out this spring. There have been ongoing secrets. As this is the last in the series, (Cathy pauses to stretch out the next words), allí .willí .beí ..revealed.

Q: How has being a Sister in Crime affected you?

I have learned so much about the world of mystery books! There's been info in newsletters, workshops, and seminars. It makes me feel more comfortable.

The group embraces you. It's hard to sell your books, but the group is so inclusive. Being in Sisters in Crime led to my joining Crime Writers of Canada, where I'm now National Vice-President. When I first joined Sisters in Crime, I was pleased, but it wasn't until I took an active interest that I felt the level of support that has spurred me on to new things.

For more information about **Catherine Astolfo**, visit:
<http://www.catherineastolfo.com/>

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