

CRIMINAL INTENT

Featuring: Garry Ryan

Interviewed by: Janet Costello



Garry Ryan is the author of five Detective Lane books. The Lucky Elephant Restaurant won the Lambda Literary Award for Best Gay Mystery. He is the President of Crime Writers of Canada. He was born, and still lives, in Calgary. Garry joined Sisters in Crime at Bloody Words in Victoria.

Q: There are several Canadian mystery writers who are teachers. Is there a correlation between teaching and writing?

A: I don't know that. I think teaching gives you lots of material. You meet a lot of people that you want to remember. Later, you'll find out things about them, for example, tragedies in their lives and how they've survived them.

Q: You are the current President of Crime Writers of Canada. Tell us about this experience.

A: I get to work with some really good people: interesting people, from across the country. You get some positive input. All of this is more fodder for writing.

Q: Why have you set your books in Calgary?

A: It's going to sound really hokey, but I live there! I like to walk the settings. Calgary gets in your bones. Also, I've lived in South East Asia. I see Calgary more clearly since then, and I see things I wouldn't have noticed before. When I miss Asia, I go to Chinatown to feel at home. In Singapore, I got used to being the only European in a crowd. Chinatown gives me that. But the rainbow of people in Calgary makes me comfortable.

Q: Do most readers embrace your love of coffee?

A: Some people comment on it. You can sit in a coffee shop and hear the conversations. In Calgary, ten months of the year, you need to jumpstart your day with coffee just to keep warm. On my website, Stephen put a section for the Calgary coffee shops. He thought it was a good idea, as they are in the books. It's a co-operative thing. You live in a town with coffee shops and book stores that sell your books, and you work together to help each other. So I set the coffee shops in my books to promote them. I don't get paid for that.

Q: You've said, "Murder is a very social issue." Can you explain?

A: Well, I think who is murdered, and the way they are murdered, is socially relevant. A lot of women die

from domestic violence. There is an inequity between men and women when it comes to murder. But you can't shy away from the facts. Why did Karla Homolka get such a lighter sentence? Defence attorneys use that card. "He did it because he made me do it." This view has social behavior around it. We shouldn't see a murder without the social aspects or consumerism around it.

Q: Detective Lane is on a journey toward finding a family. How do you define family?

A: Family is the people that come together. It's not just a biological thing. They like each other and a bond is created. Family is people who would lie down and die for you. The heart of the matter is that it's a basic need, like food or shelter or clothing. You need to belong and be accepted.

Q: Your quirky characters like Nanny from Queen's Park and Fibre, the forensic expert, add light moments that offset the darkness of murder. Is that balance easy for you?

A: They are real. Nanny is almost word for word based on a real person. Fiberí I worked with people who have Asperger's. I see them as very human. I like them. Maybe that tells you something about my quirky sense of humour. Sometimes I see the humour in a very tragic situation.

Q: You had a dog named Scout in your work and your personal life. What degree of your own life ends up in your fiction?

A: If you have a dog or a cat, you understand the role they play in the family. You watch what they do and how people interact with them. I have a new dog named Sam now, and he's in the later books. In *The Lucky Elephant Restaurant* readers were angry that a dog was killed. Animals show another side of the characters. Pets connect people to the story. They allow humour because they have no social limitations. A dog can lick himself in a room full of people. That is gold as far as a writer is concerned. I watch people and how they react to those kinds of situations. It tells you a great deal about their

personalities. Then it can become an aspect of the character in your story.

Q: Tell us about the historical novel you're working on.

A: The novel is called *Blackbirds*. I'm working on it now. I have to have a draft ready by Monday. (Two days after our interview!) It will be published in September. It's about a young Canadian woman, in 1940, whose mother has died of cancer. She goes to England. She knows how to fly. In 1940 they really needed pilots. Of course, it holds themes of the society then and human rights.

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

A: It gives me a different perspective on the whole writing business. The GTA has its own flavor. Sisters in Crime is a co-operative organization. Out here, it's just beginning to become a writing community. For a long time it hadn't reached the critical mass to achieve that.

To learn more about Garry visit
<http://www.garryryan.ca/>

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